

The Permanence of the Theologico-Political?

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There was, in the nineteenth century, a widespread and lasting conviction that one cannot discern the transformations that occur in political society—that one cannot really take stock of what is appearing, disappearing, or reappearing—without examining the religious significance of the old and the new. In both France and Germany, philosophy, history, the novel, and poetry all testify to that. This conviction is not, of course, entirely new, and it can be traced far back in history. I am not thinking of the work of theologians and jurists, or of their disputations over the links between the authority of kings and emperors, and that of popes; no matter how they exercised it, their thought was still confined within the limits of a theologico-political experience of the world. It is, it seems to me, in the sixteenth century that we detect the first signs of a modern reflection upon politics and religion; it is then that a new sensitivity to the question of the foundations of the civil order is born as a result of the combined effects of the collapse of the authority of the Church and of the struggles that accompanied the Reformation, as a result both of the assertion of the absolute right of the prince and of challenges to that right. It is, however, still true to say that at the beginning of the nineteenth century a much wider debate is inaugurated as a result of the French Revolution. It is while that event is still a living memory that there arises a feeling that a break has occurred, but that it did not occur within time, that it establishes a relationship between human beings and time itself, that it makes history a mystery; that it cannot be circumscribed within the field of what are termed political, social, or economic institutions; that it establishes a relationship between human beings and the institution itself; that it makes society a mystery. The religious meaning of this break haunts the minds of the men of the period, no matter what verdicts they may reach—no matter whether they look for signs of a restoration of Catholicism, for signs of

a renewal of Christianity within Catholicism or Protestantism, for signs of the fulfillment of Christianity in political and social life, outside the old framework of the Churches, or even for signs of its complete destruction and of the birth of a new faith. To mention only the case of France, we might say that at one extreme we have legitimists like De Maistre, that at the other we have socialists like Leroux, and that, between the two extremes, we have such individual thinkers as Ballanche, Chateaubriand, Michelet, and Quinet; they all speak the same language, and it is simultaneously political, philosophical, and religious.

It is true—and let us not forget it—that the same period sees the assertion of a new state of mind, of a tendency (traces of which can be found in the sixteenth century, and which became clearly outlined during the French Revolution) to conceive of the state as an independent entity, to make politics a reality *sui generis*, and to relegate religion to the domain of private belief. As early as 1817, Hegel was already denouncing this tendency in terms that foreshadow its future developments. Arguing in the *Encyclopedia* that “the state rests on the ethical sentiment, and that on the religious,” he adds this valuable commentary:

It has been the monstrous blunder of our times to try to look upon these inseparables as separable from one another, and even as mutually indifferent. The view taken of the relationship of religion and the state has been that, whereas the state had an independent existence of its own, springing from some source and power, religion was a later addition, something desirable perhaps for strengthening the political bulwarks, but purely subjective in individuals:—or it may be, religion is treated as something without effect on the moral life of the state, i.e., its reasonable law and constitution, which are based on a ground of their own.¹

Before long, similar criticisms became widespread in France, but they were based upon different premises, were inspired by humanism or by a socialism tinged with a new religiosity, and were addressed to adversaries who came to the fore when the reign of Louis-Philippe ensured the triumph of a pragmatic or even cynical politics, which Victor Cousin painted in more favorable colors as eclecticism. This “bastard philosophy,” to use Leroux’s expression, certainly celebrates the indestructible virtues of religion, but it does so in order to subordinate them to the preservation of a political order that, to cite Hegel once more, is based on a ground of its own.

We therefore have to recognize that what is now the dominant conception of politics goes back a long way. Its origins seem to merge with those of the bourgeois spirit—with the spirit of a bourgeoisie that has become politically dominant. Without wishing to dwell on the vicissitudes of ideology that drove it from the intellectual scene, we ought, then, to say that it is not in the work of the thinkers we first mentioned that we find the first signs of our modernity, but in eclecticism. The “monstrous blunder” that Hegel denounces would therefore appear to designate the truth of modern times, the truth of our

own times. The judgment of history, which he evokes so often, appears to have gone against him, to have denounced his blunder. In more general terms, we would then have to conclude that, if those thinkers who sought the religious truth of the political revolution they had witnessed (and I am referring to the democratic revolution) seem so alien to the sensibilities of our time, it is because they had no understanding of the new. But can we leave matters at that, and wax ironic about their wild imaginings? For these thinkers, the ancien régime was something that had existed in living memory. They still lived in the gap between a world that was disappearing and a world that was appearing, and their thought was still haunted by questions that knew no limits—by which I mean that it was not yet restricted by any presuppositions as to how to define objects of knowledge or as to how to define politics, religion, law, economics, or culture. Might we not ask ourselves whether these thinkers may, even if they were mistaken, have had a singular ability to grasp a symbolic dimension of the political, of something that was later to disappear, of something that bourgeois discourse was already burying beneath its supposed knowledge of the real order of society?

Before we attempt to answer that question, we must first define our terms.

It is certainly a fact that political institutions have long been separated from religious institutions; it is also a fact that religious beliefs have retreated into the realm of private opinion.² The phenomenon is observable even in countries where Catholicism remains the dominant religion. True, this statement has to be qualified if we also take into consideration those European countries that have come under totalitarian domination. But, while that phenomenon is thought-provoking, let us ignore it for the moment in order to concentrate on our general observation. Does it have any meaning in itself? Can we say that religion has simply disappeared in the face of politics (and survives only on the periphery of politics) without asking ourselves what its investment in the political realm once meant? And do we not have to assume that it was so profoundly invested therein as to have become unrecognizable to those who believe its effects to have been exhausted? Can we not admit that, despite all the changes that have occurred, the religious survives in the guise of new beliefs and new representations, and that it can therefore return to the surface, in either traditional or novel forms, when conflicts become so acute as to produce cracks in the edifice of the state?

According to the former view, the "modern" notion of politics is not in doubt and derives from our actual experience. According to the latter, it is an index of our ignorance or disavowal of a hidden part of social life, namely, the processes that make people consent to a given regime—or, to put it more forcefully, that determine *their manner of being in society*—and that guarantee that this regime or mode of society has a permanence in time, regardless of the various events that may affect it. Following that line of argument would not necessarily take us back to those interpretations (and they are, moreover, contradictory) that regarded the link between the religious and the political to be indissoluble, but we would at least have to recapture something of their inspiration.

If, however, we specify the terms of our question in this way, we cannot fail to notice that they are closely related to the meaning we give to the words *the religious* and, more important still, *the political*. We must, then, examine their meaning.

We can define *the religious* in broader or narrower terms, and the threshold beyond which the word loses all pertinence is a matter for debate; it would, however, seem that we can readily agree that certain beliefs, attitudes, and representations reveal a religious sensibility, even though the agents concerned do not relate them to any dogma; even though they do not imply any fidelity to a church; and even though they may, in certain cases, go hand in hand with militant atheism. The expression "religious sensibility" retains a fairly precise content if we relate it to historically and culturally determined phenomena: in other words, not to religion in general but to the Christian religion, whose various manifestations we can identify without any risk of error. The word *political*, on the other hand, brings us face to face with an ambiguity that must be resolved if we are to know what we are talking about. The fact that we can choose to say either *the political* [le politique] or *politics* [la politique] is, as we all know, an index of this ambiguity. What is certain is that the delimitation of the domain known as "the political" does not result from methodological criteria alone. The very notion of "limits" in fact derives from a desire for an "objective" definition—a desire that lies at the origin of the political theory, political science, and political sociology that have developed in the course of our century. No matter whether we attempt, for example, to circumscribe an order of social relations that are intelligible in themselves, such as power relations; to conceive of a body of social functions whose necessary articulation signals the coherence of a system; to distinguish a superstructural level, based upon relations of production in which class domination is at once expressed and disguised by institutions, practices, and representations that supposedly serve the general interest; or, finally, to identify from empirical observation which of the mass of social facts relate directly or indirectly to the exercise of power, the underlying assumption is always the same: we assume that the object can have substance only if it is particular. In other words, the epistemological operation through which we relate to the object—be it posited as "real" or as "ideal"—makes it appear by separating it from other defined or definable objects. The criterion of what is *political* is supplied by the criterion of what is *nonpolitical*, by the criterion of what is economic, social, juridical, aesthetic, or religious. This operation is not innocent; it hides behind a truism borrowed from the domain constituted as that of exact knowledge: science deals only with particulars. It need scarcely be pointed out that this disposition has never prevented anyone from looking for articulations between that which pertains to politics and that which pertains to different realities or different systems; on the contrary, it usually acts as an encouragement to do so. How, for example, do power relations combine with juridical relations? How is the political system integrated into a general system as a subsystem? How are the political institutions, practices, and representations that are essential to the preservation of a mode of production determined, and what is their specific efficacy in different socio-historical

formations? How do they, in their turn, exploit a given state of culture, law, or religion? Theorists and observers are only too willing to formulate such problems. Indeed, those who take a relational, a Marxist, a functionalist, or a descriptive stance urge us to use our historical experience as a means to identify the various modes of the articulation of social relations, subsystems, and superstructural levels. But it is still true to say that any attempt to conceptualize the ways in which the combinations vary derives from the preliminary operation of breaking down social data in order to find something intelligible. And it is also true to say that that operation is inspired by a principle that erects the subject into being a pure subject of knowledge, gives it a scientific neutrality, and guarantees it its self-assurance by virtue of the coherence of its constructs or observations.

We arrive at a very different idea of *the political* if we remain true to philosophy's oldest and most constant inspiration, if we use the term to refer to the principles that generate society or, more accurately, different forms of society. It would be absurd to claim that we then apprehend the political in its wider acceptance. We are elaborating a different idea, and we are guided by a different requirement of knowledge. We do not need to evoke the centuries-old debate that makes up the history of political philosophy in order to specify the meaning of this idea or of this requirement, for it is not relevant to our purposes to ask how the philosopher's search was, in the past, guided by his investigations into the essence of man, into the transition from a state of nature or into reason's self-realization in history. The idea that what distinguishes one society from another is its *regime*—or, to be more accurate and to avoid an overworked term—its *shaping* [*mise en forme*] of human coexistence has, in one form or another, always been present, and it lies, so to speak, behind the theoretical constructs and behind advances in philosophical thought that are tested against the transformation of the world. In other words, it is simply because the very notion of society already contains within it a reference to its political definition that it proves impossible, in the eyes of the philosopher, to localize the political *in* society. The space called "society" cannot in itself be conceived as a system of relations, no matter how complex we imagine that system to be. On the contrary, it is its overall schema, the particular mode of its institution, that makes it possible to conceptualize (either in the past or in the present) the articulation of its dimensions, and the relations established within it between classes, groups, and individuals, between practices, beliefs, and representations. If we fail to grasp this primordial reference to the mode of the institution of the social, to generative principles, or to an overall schema governing both the temporal and the spatial configuration of society, we lapse into a positivist fiction; we inevitably adopt the notion of a presocial society and posit as elements aspects that can only be grasped on the basis of an experience that is already social. If, for example, we grant to relations of production or the class struggle the status of reality, we forget that *social division* can only be defined—unless, of course, we posit the absurd view that it is a division between alien societies—insofar as it represents an internal division, insofar as it represents a division within a single milieu, within one

"flesh" (to use Merleau-Ponty's expression); insofar as its terms are determined by relations, but also insofar as those relations are themselves determined by their common inscription within the same space and testify to a common awareness of their inscription therein. Similarly, if we make a rigid distinction between what belongs to the realm of economics or politics (defined in modern science's sense of the term), or between what belongs to the juridical or the religious in an attempt to find within them signs of specific systems, we forget that we can arrive at that analytic distinction only because we already have a subjective idea of the primal dimensionality of the social, and that this implies an idea of its primal *form*, of its political *form*.

The difference between the idea of the political (in all its variants and all its moments) and political science (in all its variants and all its moments) is not that the latter is concerned with society as a totality and that the former rejects "totality" as an illusory object. Marxist science, for example (and I am not referring here to Marx himself; his thought is at once more ambiguous and more subtle than this), does indeed claim to be able to reconstruct a real or ideal totality; Parsonian science also claims to be able to rearticulate systems of functions within what it terms a "general system." The opposition manifests itself at a different level. The philosopher is not necessarily in search of an elusive object such as a totality; he looks at different regimes or forms of society in order to identify a principle of internalization that can account for a specific mode of differentiation and articulation between classes, groups, and social ranks, and, at the same time, for a specific mode of discrimination between markers—economic, juridical, aesthetic, religious markers—that order the experience of coexistence.

We can further specify the notion of shaping [*mise en forme*] that we have introduced by pointing out that it implies both the notion of giving meaning [*mise en sens*] to social relations (the expression *mise en sens* is taken from Piera Aulagnier) and that of staging them [*mise en scène*]. Alternatively, we can say that the advent of a society capable of organizing social relations can come about only if it can institute the conditions of their intelligibility, and only if it can use a multiplicity of signs to arrive at a quasi-representation of itself. But we must again stress that the shaping or institution of the political cannot be reduced to the limits of the social as such. As soon as we posit as *real* the distinction between what is social and what is not social, we enter the realm of fiction. We have just said that the principle of internalization that enables us to conceptualize the political presupposes a mode of discriminating between the various markers that organize the experience of coexistence, and that experience is inseparable from the experience of the world, from the experience of the visible and the invisible in every register. It need scarcely be stressed that discrimination between real and imaginary, true and false, just and unjust, natural and supernatural, and normal and abnormal is not restricted to the relations people establish in social life. The elaboration attested to by any political society—and not simply the society in which the subject who is trying to decipher it lives—therefore involves an investigation into the world, into Being as such. Understanding how

the experience of an *objective* world, of a world that is what it is independently of particular collective experiences, arose—at least partially—in the course of history (and it is tempting to describe it in Husserlian terms as a transition from the socio-political *Umwelt* to the *Welt*) would, of course, be a formidable task, and a further task for political thought.

For the moment, however, we will restrict ourselves to an examination of the difference between political philosophy and political science. We can agree that the latter encounters problems that bear the hallmark of philosophical research, but for political science they are of course no more than *problems* to be circumvented, along with other problems, during the process of reconstructing or describing the workings of society. In fact, the theorist who analyzes politics in terms of power relations cannot but ask himself how and why they stabilize in any given configuration in such a way that the dominant power does not have to exercise its authority openly, irrespective of whether he grants them their own logic or sees them as a reflection or a transposition of class relations that are themselves determined by a mode of production. He cannot but ask how and why they succeed in eluding the understanding of actors, how and why they appear to be legitimate or in accordance with the nature of things. Apparently, then, his problem is how to account for the process of the internalization of domination. But he resolves that problem by looking beyond the frontiers of politics for the nature and origins of the process, by appealing to the mechanisms of representation he finds in the spheres of law, religion, or technical-scientific knowledge. Similarly, the theorist who defines the specificity of political action by subordinating it to functional imperatives (ensuring the unification or cohesion of the social whole, making it possible to formulate and achieve general objectives) is not unaware of the fact that his definition is purely formal. He therefore accepts that such functions can be performed only if social agents internalize the political imperative. And in order to account for that, he invokes the values and norms that determine behavioral models within a given system of culture. But he then assigns specific functions to those norms and values; he seeks to find the preconditions for their efficacy within the coherence of the system whence they derive. In short, whatever the schema of the reconstruction or description may be, his approach always consists in isolating relations and combining them in order to deduce *society* from these operations. The fact that certain of these relations are assumed to provide a key to the modes of the internalization of the social should deceive no one. The theorist is moving to an external element. When he speaks of law, religion, science, values, norms, and categories of knowledge, he is simply filling in the blanks in a pre-given schema of actions, practices, and relations (defined in either materialist or formalist terms). The second operation depends upon the first. Precisely how the object is repositioned to allow the transition from the level of the real or the functional to the so-called level of the symbolic is of little import. Precisely how the element of the imaginary or of language is introduced is of little import. The conclusion that, in the last analysis, power relations, relations of production, or functional

relations are always "represented" or "spoken" by religious, juridical, or scientific signs is also of little import. This notion of the symbolic does not help us to escape an artificialist conception. It is deployed in a play of articulation whose terms have already been separated out, and it is grafted onto something that is assumed to contain within it its own determination.

The opposition between philosophy and science is one between two intellectual requirements. For science, knowledge finds its self-assurance by defining functional models; it operates in accordance with an ideal of objectivity that introduces a sovereign distance between the subject and the social. The externality of the knowing subject is of necessity combined with the idea that the social can stand outside itself. Conversely, any system of thought that takes up the question of the institution of the social is simultaneously confronted with the question of its own institution. It cannot restrict itself to comparing structures and systems once it realizes that the elaboration of coexistence creates meaning, produces markers for distinguishing between true and false, just and unjust, and imaginary and real; and that it establishes the horizons of human beings' relations with one another and with the world. It attempts to explain itself and, at the same time, to explain its object. In that respect, it seems to me that there is no radical difference between our present requirement and those of the philosophy of history or of ancient philosophy. We have lost the criteria of classical reason, refuse to distinguish between healthy and corrupt regimes, between legitimate and illegitimate authorities—a distinction based upon the idea of a human essence—and find it impossible to invoke the idea of the development of Mind—which would allow us to see the constitution of the modern state as both the completion of an itinerary and the meaning of the stages (progression, regression, and digression) that go to make it up. Nevertheless, we are still traversed by our investigation into the meaning of the human adventure that unfolds in different forms of political society, and that investigation is still a response to our experience of the political in the here and now. We look for signs of truth and signs of legitimacy, for traces of the concealment of truth and right, and we do so because of the tension inherent in any thought that is trying to define what it has the *right* to think.

To return to the question with which we began: that of the historical disentanglement of the religious and the political. In the context of sociology or political science, their disentanglement is an obvious fact, which leaves intact the categories of knowledge of the social. The political and the religious are regarded as two separate orders of practice and relations; the problem is one of understanding how they are articulated, or how they cease to be articulated, by examining empirical history. The fact that for hundreds or, rather, thousands of years human beings made no such distinction, and that they gave a religious expression to the functions exercised by authority or to the power relations whence it arose, does not detract from the need to recognize the pertinence of a distinction whose value is self-evident in terms of objective analysis. Now this approach brings us up against a double difficulty. On the one hand, history, like society before it, loses all depth; the

phenomenon of separation becomes an index of one general system among others; and science assumes a resolutely relativist stance. When this happens, science conceals the conditions of its own formation and, along with them, the basis for the claim that its operations have a universal validity, as it is the fact of separation that allows it to identify the specificity of politics. On the other hand, we have a combination of a dialectical or evolutionary theory and the idea that the elimination of religion from the political field marks the formation of a rational, or potentially rational, type of society in which institutions and practices appear, or begin to appear, for what they really are. But in that case, the fact of the separation of the religious and the political tells us nothing in itself; its meaning is established by reference to a law of historical development or to the laws of the dynamic of social structures.

The philosopher finds himself in a different position. When he thinks of the principles that generate society and names them "the political," he automatically includes religious phenomena within his field of reference. This does not mean that, in his view, the religious and the political can coincide. It does, however, mean that one cannot separate the elaboration of a political form—by virtue of which the nature and representation of power and social division (divisions between classes and groups) can stabilize, and by virtue of which the various dimensions of the human experience of the world can simultaneously become organized—from the elaboration of a religious form, by virtue of which the realm of the visible can acquire death, and by virtue of which the living can name themselves with reference to the dead, whilst the human word can be guaranteed by a primal pact, and whereas rights and duties can be formulated with reference to a primal law. In short, both the political and the religious bring philosophical thought face to face with the symbolic, not in the sense in which the social sciences understand that term, but in the sense that, through their internal articulations, both the political and the religious govern access to the world. This does not make it inconceivable that there is, in any society, a potential conflict between the two principles, or even that it is universally, if tacitly, recognized to exist. Nor does the fact that there is in the modern world an imperative to make a clear distinction between the realms they regulate create difficulties for political thought; this state of affairs in fact meets its requirements, as it has never been able to submit to the authority of religion without demeaning itself, and as it demands the right to seek its foundations within its own activities. In a sense, this revolutionary event is the accomplishment of philosophy's destiny; philosophy is bound up with that event in that it finds the conditions for its own emancipation at the very moment when human beings acquire a potential grasp of their own history, a means to escape the fatalism imposed on their lives by the subjugation of the social order to religious law, and a means to detect the possibility of a better regime in their practices and the novelties they create. But it would be quite illegitimate to leap to the conclusion that religion as such must disappear or, to be more accurate, that it must be confined to the realm of personal opinion. How, in fact, could we argue this, without losing all sense of the symbolic dimen-

sion of religion, of the dimension that constitutes the relations human beings establish with the world? The fact that differences of opinion are now recognized to be legitimate does, of course, have a symbolic meaning, but only, it would seem, within the limitations of a political system that guarantees every individual the right to enjoy the respect he must show others. What philosophical thought strives to preserve is the experience of a difference that goes beyond differences of opinion (and the recognition of the relativity of points of view that this implies); the experience of a difference that is not at the disposal of human beings, whose advent does not take place *within* human history, and that cannot be abolished therein; the experience of a difference that relates human beings to their humanity, and that means that their humanity cannot be self-contained, that it cannot set its own limits, and that it cannot absorb its origins and ends into those limits. Every religion states in its own way that human society can only open onto itself by being held in an opening it did not create. Philosophy says the same thing, but religion said it first, albeit in terms that philosophy cannot accept.

Philosophy's critique of religion is therefore ambivalent. Whereas, for example, it rejects the truth that the Christian churches find in Revelation and, in theory, escapes the authority of the Text and refuses to accept the image of a God who comes down to earth and is incarnated in the person of his Son, it does not assume that untruth is a lie or a lure. Nor, when it remains true to its inspiration, does it want to preserve untruth for the simple reason that it may contain beliefs that help to preserve the established political order. What philosophy discovers in religion is a mode of portraying or dramatizing the relations that human beings establish with something that goes beyond empirical time and the space within which they establish relations with one another. This work of the imagination stages [*met en scène*] a different time, a different space. Any attempt to reduce it to being simply a product of human activity is doomed. Of course, it bears the mark of human operations in that the script for the performance bears witness to a human presence and borrows from human sense experience. Human beings populate the invisible with the things they see, naively invent a time that exists before time, organize a space that exists behind their space; they base the plot on the most general conditions of their lives. Yet anything that bears the mark of their experience also bears the mark of an *ordeal*. Once we recognize that humanity opens onto itself by being held in an opening it does not create, we have to accept that the change in religion is not to be read simply as a sign that the divine is a human invention but as a sign of the deciphering of the divine or, beneath the appearance of the divine, of the excess of *being* over *appearance*. In that sense, modern religion or Christianity proves to be teaching the philosopher what he has to think. He rejects religion insofar as it is the enunciator of Revelation but, insofar as it is a mode of the enunciation of the divine, he at the same time accords it a power of revelation that philosophy cannot do without, if, that is, it ceases to divorce the question of human nature from the question of human history.

To simplify the argument to extremes: what philosophical thought cannot adopt as its own, on pain of betraying its ideal of intelligibility, is the assertion that the man Jesus is the Son of God; what it must accept is the meaning of the advent of a representation of the *God-Man*, because it sees it as a Change that recreates humanity's opening onto itself, in both the senses in which we have defined it. Modern philosophy cannot ignore its debt to modern religion; it can no longer distance itself from the work of the imagination or appropriate it as a pure object of knowledge; once it finds itself grappling with the question of its own advent, once it no longer conceals from itself that there is also such a thing as the philosophical *work of thought* and that the focus of its investigations can be displaced, even though it may indulge in the fantasy of being able to put a halt to its displacements. The philosopher's pretensions to Absolute Knowledge notwithstanding, the substitution of the concept for the image leaves intact the experience of alterity in language and of a division between creation and unveiling, between activity and passivity, and between the expression and impression of meaning.

These last remarks may, perhaps, bring us closer to the most secret reasons for the philosopher's continued attachment to the religious. Justified as his demand for the right to think may be, and even though it frees him from every established authority, he not only realizes that any society that forgets its religious basis is laboring under the illusion of pure self-immanence and thus obliterates the locus of philosophy, he also senses that philosophy is bound up with religion because they are both caught up in an adventure to which philosophy does not possess the main key. And so when he proclaims that Christianity's end has come, he still invokes the birth of a new faith, because he is unable to divorce his knowledge from a primordial knowledge that is at once latent and widely shared. Despite appearances, he therefore refuses to accept the historical fact of the separation of the religious and the political. As we have said, he argues that those who accept it as an established fact have a mistaken notion of the political. But in doing so he runs the risk of denying that appearances have sufficient consistency to represent a new practice, to inscribe themselves in some way in the reality of power and the state. But, given that he accords representation a symbolic status and that he still thinks it impossible to divorce the position of power from its representation, a problem should now arise as to how to evaluate the change implied by the representation of a form of power that has no religious basis. Unless this problem arises, a philosophical critique will have no import or will consist simply in the denunciation of erroneous opinions. But, as we have already seen, that was not its objective; its object was the possibility of so shaping society that the religious world would be merely misrecognized or disavowed.

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The future that the thinkers of the nineteenth century were attempting to decipher is to some extent our past and our present. The meaning of our present itself is, of course,

dependent upon an indeterminate future; but we enjoy the advantage of an experience that was denied them and that brings a new relief to their debates. In their day, the political form we know as modern democracy was only just coming into being. All its premises had been established, but it still kept its secret, even though its dynamic and its ambiguities were partly visible, as we can see, in particular, from certain of Tocqueville's extraordinary insights into the future. The project of totalitarianism, however, still lay beyond the horizons of their political thought, and there can be no doubt that it both helps shed light on the secret of democracy and urges us to investigate anew the religious and the political.

Modern democracy testifies to a highly specific shaping [*mise en forme*] of society, and we would try in vain to find models for it in the past, even though it is not without its heritage. The new determination—representation of the *place of power*—bears witness to its shaping. And it is certainly this distinctive feature that designates the political. I deliberately refrained from stressing this earlier because I was concerned with bringing out the difference between political science and political philosophy by showing that the former attempts to circumscribe an order of particular facts *within* the social and that the task of the latter is to conceptualize the principle of the institution of the social. But now that the danger of ambiguity has been removed, we no longer need to be afraid to advance the view that any political philosophy and any political science is governed by a reflection upon power. Precisely because of this, they do not deal with specifics but with a primal division that is constitutive of the space we call society. And the fact that this space is organized as *one* despite (or because of) its multiple divisions and that it is organized as *the same* in all its multiple dimensions implies reference to a place from which it can be seen, read, and named. Even before we examine it in its empirical determinations, this symbolic pole proves to be power; it manifests society's self-externality and ensures that society can achieve a quasi-representation of itself. We must, of course, be careful not to project this externality onto the real; if we did so it would no longer have any meaning for society. It would be more accurate to say that power makes a gesture toward something *outside*, and that it defines itself in terms of that outside. Whatever its form, it always refers to the same enigma: that of an internal-external articulation, of a division that institutes a common space, of a break that establishes relations, of a movement of the externalization of the social that goes hand in hand with its internalization. I have for a long time concentrated upon this peculiarity of modern democracy: of all the regimes of which we know, it is the only one to have represented power in such a way as to show that power is an *empty place* and to have thereby maintained a gap between the symbolic and the real. It does so by virtue of a discourse which reveals that power belongs to no one; that those who exercise power do not possess it; that they do not, indeed, embody it; that the exercise of power requires a periodic and repeated contest; that the authority of those vested with power is created and re-created as a result of the manifestation of the will of the people. It could, of course, rightly be pointed out that the principle of a power

that men are forbidden to appropriate had already been asserted in classical democracy, but it need scarcely be pointed out that power still had a positive determination in that the representation of the city and the definition of citizenship rested upon a discrimination based upon natural criteria or—and this comes to the same thing—supernatural criteria.

The idea that power belongs to no one is not, therefore, to be confused with the idea that it designates an empty place. The former idea may be formulated by political actors, but not the latter. The first formulation, in fact, implies the actors' self-representation, as they deny one another the right to take power. The old Greek formula to the effect that power is *in the middle* (and historians tell us that it was elaborated within the framework of an aristocratic society before being bequeathed to democracy) still indicates the presence of a group that has an image of itself, of its space, and of its bounds. The reference to an empty place, by contrast, eludes speech insofar as it does not presuppose the existence of a community whose members discover themselves to be subjects by the very fact of their being members. The formula "power belongs to no one" can also be translated into the formula "power belongs to none of us" (and in historical terms, this appears to be the earlier of the two). The reference to an empty place, by contrast, implies reference to a society without any positive determination, which cannot be represented by the figure of a community. It is because the division of power does not, in a modern democracy, refer to an *outside* that can be assigned to the gods, the city, or holy ground; because it does not refer to an *inside* that can be assigned to the substance of the community. Or, to put it another way, it is because there is no materialization of the *Other* (which would allow power to function as a mediator, no matter how it were defined) that there is no materialization of the *One* (which would allow power to function as an incarnation). Nor can power be divorced from the work of division by which society is instituted; a society can therefore relate to itself only through the experience of an internal division that proves to be not a *de facto* division, but a division that generates its constitution.

It should also be added that, once it has lost its double reference to the *Other* and to the *One*, power can no longer condense the principle of Law and the principle of Knowledge within itself. It therefore appears to be limited. And it therefore opens up the possibility of relations and actions that, in various realms, in particular in those of production and exchange, can be ordered in terms of norms and in accordance with specific goals.

If we wished to pursue this argument, we would have to examine in detail the processes that regulate the establishment of democratic power, in other words, the controlled challenge to the authority vested in its exercise. It is enough to recall that this requires an institutionalization of conflict and a quasi-dissolution of social relations at the very moment of the manifestation of the will of the people. These two phenomena are both indicative of the above-mentioned articulation between the idea that power is a purely symbolic agency and the idea that society has no substantial unity. The institutionalization of conflict is not within the remit of power; it is rather that power depends upon the

institutionalization of conflict. Its institutionalization is the result of a juridical elaboration, and, in this first sense, it allows us to identify a field specific to politics: the field of competition between protagonists whose modes of action and programs explicitly designate them as laying claim to the exercise of public authority. This immediately reveals the link between the legitimacy of power and the legitimacy of a conflict that seems to constitute politics, but it must also be noted that this phenomenon presupposes the coming together of a number of conditions relating to social life as a whole: freedom of association and of expression, and the freedom of ideas and of people to circulate. In this respect, the idea of a division between the sphere of the state and the sphere of civil society, which is so often invoked, seems to blur rather than to elucidate the features of the democratic phenomenon. It prevents us from identifying a general configuration of social relations in which diversity and opposition are made visible. It is, I believe, also noteworthy that the delineation of a specifically political activity has the effect of erecting a *stage* on which conflict is acted out for all to see (once citizenship is no longer reserved for a small number) and is represented as being necessary, irreducible, and legitimate. That each party claims to have a vocation to defend the *general* interest and to bring about *union* is of little importance; the antagonism between them sanctions another vocation: society's vocation for division. It is also of little importance that what is at stake in the political conflict does not coincide with what is at stake in the class struggle, or the struggle between interests; whatever the degree of distortion introduced by the shift from the political level to the social level, the important point is that all *de facto* divisions are transfigured and transposed onto a stage on which division appears to exist *de jure*. This phenomenon is, as we have noted, combined with the singular procedure of universal suffrage, which is based upon the principle of popular sovereignty but which, at the very moment when the people are supposed to express their will, transforms them into a pure diversity of individuals, each one of whom is abstracted from the network of social ties within which his existence is determined—into a plurality of atoms or, to be more precise, into statistics. In short, the ultimate reference to the identity of the people, to the instituting subject, proves to mask the enigmatic arbitration of number.

Let us stop and retrace our steps after this first stage in our analysis. The representation of politics that lies at the origins of social science is, it must be agreed, generated by the very constitution of democracy, for it is indeed true, as social science asserts, that power no longer makes any gesture toward an *outside*, that it is no longer articulated with any *other* force that can be represented, and that, in that sense, it is disentangled from the religious. It is indeed true that power no longer refers to any point of origin that coincides with the origins of Law and Knowledge and that, in that sense, the type of actions and relations that cluster around its pole can be distinguished from other types of actions and relations that might be termed juridical, economic, and cultural, and it is therefore true that something can be circumscribed as being *politics* [la politique]. The one thing that remains hidden from the gaze of the scientific observer is the symbolic form that, as a

result of the mutation in power, makes this new distinction possible: the essence of *the political* [du politique]. The illusion that the political can be localized within society is therefore not without a certain consistency, and to dismiss it as a mistaken opinion would mean surrendering to one more illusion.

Modern democracy is, we have said, the only regime to indicate the gap between the symbolic and the real by using the notion of a power that no one—no prince and no minority—can seize. It has the virtue of relating society to the experience of its institution. When an empty place emerges, there can be no possible conjunction between power, law, and knowledge, and their foundations cannot possibly be enunciated. The being of the social vanishes or, more accurately, presents itself in the shape of an endless series of questions (witness the incessant, shifting debates between ideologies). The ultimate markers of certainty are destroyed, and at the same time there is born a new awareness of the unknown element in history, of the gestation of humanity in all the variety of its figures. It must, however, also be made clear that the gap is merely indicated, that it is operative, but that it is not visible, that it does not have the status of an object of knowledge. It is the attributes of power that are exposed to our gaze, the distinctive features of the contest in which power appears to be the prize. The things that capture our attention and that are designated as objects to be known are the mechanisms that control the formation of a public authority, the selection of leaders, and, more generally, the nature of the institutions vested with the exercise and control of that authority. And so the symbolic dimension of the social passes unnoticed, precisely because it is no longer masked beneath a representation of the difference between the visible world and the invisible world.

This, then, is the paradox: regimes in which the figure of power stands out against an *other* force do not completely obscure the political principle behind the social order. Where the religious basis of power is fully affirmed, it appears to be both the guarantor and the guardian of the certainty that supports the experience of the world; at the same time, it appears to be the keeper of the law that finds its expression in social relations and that maintains their unity. By contrast, democracy, in which the figure of the *other* is abolished, in which power is not divorced from the division that generates it—I will not say that power is stripped bare, as that would imply surrendering to yet another realist fiction—and in which power therefore eludes our grasp (escapes appropriation and representation), is a regime that cannot be apprehended in its political form. While the contours of society become blurred, and while the markers of certainty become unstable, there arises the illusion of a reality that can explain its own determination in terms of a combination of multiple *de facto* relations.

Now, does not an analysis of this type also lead us to ask whether political philosophy, which does, for its part, continue to search for the principles that generate modern society, might not be caught in the trap of appearances in that it takes the view that society's religious basis is indestructible? That conviction is no doubt based upon the idea that no human society, whatever it may be, can be organized in terms of pure self-immanence.

But is this the only reason for its attachment to the religious? Is not political philosophy guided by a quest for an ultimate knowledge that, although it is won in response to the requirements of reflection, is still formulated in terms of knowledge of the *One*? Is not this the inspiration it wishes to preserve, and does it not sense that the advent of democracy threatens to do away with it? I am not forgetting that, in its effective movement, it contradicts this inspiration, places thought in the realm of the interrogative, and deprives it of the religious element of certainty and that, in that sense, it is, as we have noted, bound up with a political constitution that no longer permits human activities to be placed beneath the sign of a primal law. But taking its effective movement into account does not mean that we must ignore its representation of its aims. And does not the fact that it is drawn toward the religious indicate that it is retreating in the face of a political form that, by subjecting human beings to the experience of division, fragmentation, and heterogeneity in every register, and to the experience of the indeterminacy of the social and of history, undermines the ground on which philosophical knowledge was built and obscures the task it sets itself? The assertion that a society can never lose its religious basis can, in other words, be understood in one of two ways. The philosopher may mean to say that it would be illusory for society to claim to be able to confine the principle of its institution within its own limits. But in that case he fails to see that, whereas modern democracy does foster that illusion, it does so by breaking down old certainties, by inaugurating an experience in which society is constantly in search of its own foundations. He fails to see that it is not the dimension but the figure of the *other* that it abolishes and that, while there is a risk involved in the loss of the religious, there is also something to be gained by calling the law into question, that freedom is a conquest. Alternatively, he may mean to say that religion elaborates a primordial representation of the *One*, and that this representation proves to be a precondition for human *unity*, but we then have to ask ourselves about the reasons for the attractions of unity. We have to ask how much its attractions owe to its opposite, namely, the repugnance inspired by division and conflict. We have to ask how the philosophical idea of the *One* colludes with the image of a united society. We have to ask why unity must be conceived beneath the sign of the spiritual, and why division must be projected onto the material plane of interest.

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In order to evaluate fully this reluctance to admit that there is a separation between the political and the religious, we must go beyond the level of analysis at which we have been working. It is in fact impossible to ignore the fact that the image of union is generated or re-generated at the very heart of modern democracy. The new position of power is accompanied by a new symbolic elaboration, and, as a result, the notions of state, people, nation, fatherland, and humanity acquire equally new meanings. If we take no interest in these notions or restrict our discussion to the function they may play in the process of

legitimizing power, we adopt the artificial point of view that we described as characteristic of science. They derive, of course, from what we have called the shaping [*mise en forme*] and staging [*mise en scène*] of society, and from the process of giving it meaning [*mise en sens*]. The only problem is to determine whether or not they are essentially religious.

It is also true that, even if we do take the view that these notions are essentially religious, we will not necessarily agree as to how they are to be interpreted. It is one thing to say—in a society based upon individual freedoms—that Christianity delivers human beings from the domination of needs and from the image of their temporal finiteness, that it inspires in them a feeling of community, fraternity, and obedience to an unconditional moral principle, and that, in the absence of Christian belief, there would be no place for an ethic of service to the state or for patriotism. It is quite another thing to say that the very principle of Christianity implies a depreciation of worldly values, that religious feeling has broken with Christianity, is being re-created, and is now invested in love of the nation or of humanity. According to the former argument, social morality and the state still rest upon religion, to cite Hegel once more; according to the latter, social morality is self-sufficient because it has become religious. But, important as that distinction may be, it does not alter the terms of the question we are asking, for both interpretations appear to accept that anything that expresses the idea of having social roots, of sharing a feeling of belonging, of identifying with a principle that shapes human coexistence, must derive from a religious feeling.

Is this beyond all doubt? Do we not have to ask whether the religious might not be grafted onto a more profound experience as a result of some *determinate* representation of origins, community, and identity?

Our brief comments on the notion of the "people" in democracy suggest that it is bound up with an ambiguity that cannot adequately be translated into religious terms. The people do indeed constitute a pole of identity that is sufficiently defined to indicate that it has the status of a subject. The people possesses sovereignty; they are assumed to express its will; power is exercised in their name; politicians constantly evoke them. But the identity of the people remains latent. Quite apart from the fact that the notion of the people is dependent upon a discourse that names the people, that is itself multiple, and that lends the people multiple dimensions, and that the status of a subject can only be defined in term of a juridical constitution, the people are, as we have noted, dissolved into a numerical element at the very moment of the manifestation of their will.

A similar ambiguity arises if we examine representations that have been accorded a religious significance. When we speak of the state as a transcendent power, we mean that it has its own *raison d'être*, that in its absence society would have neither coherence nor permanence, and that, in that sense, it demands unconditional obedience and the subordination of private interests to the imperative need for its preservation. But we then fail to see that democracy disassociates political power from the existence of the state. It

is no doubt as a result of that disassociation that the state acquires its great might, that the characteristic impersonality of its operations allows it to subdue all social activities and relations to its interests and even to foster the illusion that it is a great individual, that everyone has to recognize its will as its own, to paraphrase Hegel. But it is equally certain that this tendency is held in check, because the political competition and social conflict mobilized by the democratic process of contesting the exercise of power led to an indefinite transformation of right and to a modification of the public space. Reason of state threatens to become an absolute, but it is powerless to assert itself, because it remains subject to the effects of the aspirations of individuals and groups in civil society and, therefore, to the effects of such demands as can be inscribed within the public space. When we evoke the nation, we look to it as the source of a religious faith. But do we not have to ask how it is defined, and to evaluate its debt to the discourse that enunciates it? Do we not have to ask how the nation and the feelings it inspires were, in Europe, transformed as a result of the discourse of the French Revolution and, in the nineteenth century, as a result of the new constructs of the historians who contributed so much to the formation of a new political consciousness? In the case of France, we have only to think of the role Thierry, Guizot, Mignet, or, somewhat later, Michelet played in portraying the nation's destiny, in introducing a new perspective, in reshaping values, in giving events a new depth, and in breaking history down into significant sequences. We have only to observe how effective this "composition," which was modified as a result of both the progress of knowledge and ideological imperatives, was in molding our collective memory, how it is imprinted on monuments, commemorations, place names, school textbooks, popular literature, and both major and minor political discourses. We would be wrong to conclude that a new religion is inscribed within this phenomenon simply because it implies the depiction of the origins and permanence of a community, for all signs and symbols that mobilize belief lend themselves to interpretation, to reinterpretation, and are bound up with modes of anticipating the future, with the idea of the goals that social actors imagine to be real and legitimate. The idea of the nation does not refer to a text that exists prior to the commentary; it is, of course, supported by an accretion of materials and representations, but it can never be separated from a discourse on the nation—a discourse that, while it enjoys a privileged relationship with the discourse of power, is still not amenable to appropriation. Paradoxically, it is because it is a historical entity that the nation eludes the religious imagination, which always tries to establish a narrative, to master a time that exists outside time. While the nation bestows a collective identity, it is at the same time implicated in that identity. It remains a floating representation, and the origins of the nation, the stages of its foundation, and the vectors of its destiny are therefore constantly being displaced and are always subject to the decisions of social actors—or those who speak for them—who want to establish themselves within a duration and a time that allows them to name themselves.

And why should this demand for a *name* be wholly ascribed to either the register of religion or that of ideology? Perhaps more than any other, the idea of the nation urges us to make a distinction between the symbolic, the ideological, and the religious.

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The difficulty of analyzing modern democracy arises because it reveals a movement that tends to actualize the image of the people, the state, and the nation, and because that movement is necessarily thwarted by the reference to power as an empty place and by the experience of social division. The movement of which we are speaking must be described with greater precision: when society can no longer be represented as a body and is no longer embodied in the figure of the prince, it is time that people, state, and nation acquire a new force and become the major poles by which social identity and social communality can be signified. But to assert, in order to extol it, that a new religious belief takes shape is to forget that this identity and this community remain indefinable. Conversely, to find in this belief a sign of pure illusion, as liberal thought encourages us to do, is to deny the very notion of society, to erase both the question of sovereignty and that of the meaning of the institution, which are always bound up with the ultimate question of the legitimacy of that which exists. It means, for example, reducing power—or the state, which is wrongly confused with power—to an instrumental function, and the people to a fiction that simply masks the efficacy of a contract thanks to which a minority submits to a government formed by a majority; and, finally, it means regarding only individuals and coalitions of interests and opinions as real. If we adopt this view, we replace the fiction of unity-in-itself with that of diversity-in-itself. We thereby deny ourselves the means to understand that, far from signaling a regression into the imaginary, the aspirations that have been manifested in the course of the history of democratic societies under the slogans of establishing a just state or emancipating the people have had the effect of preventing society from becoming petrified within its order, and have re-established the instituting dimension of right in the place of the law that served to establish both the respective positions of rulers and ruled, and the conditions for the appropriation of wealth, power, and knowledge.

If we reject both these modes of interpretation (not forgetting that they were outlined as a result of the constitution of a new type of society), might we not finally be able to detect the paths by which a return to the religious might be effected?

A return? It will be objected that the term presupposes that the religious never disappeared. Indeed. But it is one thing to say that beliefs have survived in their traditional form and quite another to accept that a fire which has gone out can be relit. It is, moreover, worth asking, as Merleau-Ponty used to ask, whether anything in history has ever been superseded in an absolute sense. In the present case, the analysis we were outlining reveals the possibility of situations in which the symbolic efficacy of the democratic system

is destroyed. If, in effect, the mode of the establishment of power and the nature of its exercise or, more generally, political competition prove incapable of giving form and meaning to social division, a *de facto* conflict will appear throughout society. The distinction between power as symbolic agency and power as real organ disappears. The reference to an empty place gives way to the unbearable image of a real vacuum. The authority of those who make public decisions or who are trying to do so vanishes, leaving only the spectacle of individuals or clans whose one concern is to satisfy their appetite for power. Society is put to the test of a collapse of legitimacy by the opposition between the interests of classes and various categories, by the opposition between opinions, values, and norms—and these are no less important—and by all the signs of the fragmentation of the social space, of heterogeneity. In these extreme situations, representations that can supply an index of social unity and identity become invested with a fantastic power, and the totalitarian adventure is under way.

For our purposes, it is not important to distinguish between the various modes of the formation of totalitarianism. We cannot, of course, ignore the fact that in one case the image of the people is actualized through the sanctification of the proletariat, and that in the other it is actualized through the sanctification of the nation, that the former process is shored up by a redefinition of humanity and that the latter is shored up by a redefinition of a race: communism and fascism are not to be confused. But, in terms of the question we are posing, the similarity between the two is striking. Both attempt, in one way or another, to give power a substantial reality, to bring the principles of Law and Knowledge within its orbit, to deny social division in all its forms, and to give society a *body* once more. And, it should be noted in passing, we find here an explanation as to why so many contemporary philosophers—and by no means only minor figures—have become compromised in the adventures of Nazism, fascism, or communism. The attachment to the religious that we noted earlier traps them in the illusion that unity and identity can be restored as such, and they see signs of its advent in the *union* of the social body. It is not because they submit to a charismatic authority that they lend their support to totalitarian regimes, particularly not if they rally to communism; they surrender to the attractions of a renewed certainty and, paradoxically, they use it as a pretext to assert their right to contemplate freely the basis of any experience of the world.

We should, of course, be careful not to reduce the totalitarian phenomenon to its religious aspects, as certain imprudent commentators have done. It is, rather, by exploring the genesis of ideology, by identifying the metamorphoses of a discourse that, by placing itself under the aegis of knowledge of the real, claims to escape the indeterminacy of the social, to master the principle of its institution, to rise above division so as to enunciate its terms and conditions and to inscribe it within rationality, either by preserving it in its present state or by subjecting it to the movement of its own abolition; it is by detecting the new relationship that is established between the viewpoint of science and the viewpoint of the social order that we can best arrive at an understanding of totalitarianism. This regime

represents the culmination of an artificialist project that begins to take shape in the nineteenth century: the project of creating a self-organizing society that allows the discourse of technical rationality to be imprinted on the very form of social relations and that, ultimately, reveals "social raw material" or "human raw material" to be fully amenable to organization. It would, however, be futile to make a sharp distinction between the ideological and the religious, for while the latter is disavowed insofar as it indicates an *other* place, we can also see that it is reactivated in the quest for a *mystical* union and in the representation of a body, part of which—the proletariat, the political party, the leading organ, the egocrat (to use Solzhenitsyn's phrase)—represents both the head of the people and the people in its entirety. The reproduction of this model in one sector of society after another then converts individuals into members of multiple micro-bodies.

Within the framework of ideological discourse, it is even conceivable that the representation of the organization (or, more accurately, of the machine) can combine with that of the body. Not only does extreme artificialism tend to be interchangeable with extreme organicism because of the demand for the full affirmation of the social entity, this discourse can only hold up if the social entity becomes a body and only if—no pun intended—it can embody the subjects who speak it: it tends to abolish the distance between enunciation and utterance, and to be imprinted on every subject, regardless of the signification of words.

The increasingly perceptible effects of the failure of totalitarian ideology are no less instructive. The reappearance of a divide—deeper here than in any other regime—between the discourse of power and people's experience of their situation indicates the impossibility of precipitating the symbolic into the real, of reducing power to a purely social definition, of materializing power in the persons of those vested with it, of representing society as a body without supplying it with an external guarantor of its organization and limits, and of abolishing social division. The nature of this discourse is in fact such that the subject either loses all notion of its own position or perceives it as being totally alien, as a mere product of a group that manipulates words in order to conceal facts. Once belief in communism is shaken, it gives way to the image of a party or a power that rules through force; to the image of an external force that subjugates the society it claims to embody; to the image of a law that is its property, of a law that is designed to conceal the rule of the arbitrary; to the image of a truth of history that is designed to conceal lies. And when signs are inverted, when the plenitude of communism reveals a void, when the people break up and morals break down, or when, to use Hegel's language once more, social morality and the state collapse, we see the return of democratic aspirations and, along with them, the old faith, which means primarily the Christian faith. In response to the fantastic attempt to compress space and time into the limits of the social body, there reappears a reference to an absent body which symbolizes a time-span that can be neither appropriated, mastered, nor reduced. Certainty is reborn, together with a

singular ability to attack the image of the "new man" and of the "radiant future" by deriding it.

Might it not, however, be a further mistake to believe that the new links that are being forged between the democratic opposition and the religious opposition bear witness to the democratic essence of Christianity or to the Christian essence of democracy? If we accept that, do we not lose sight of the meaning of the adventure that began when they became disentangled in the nineteenth century? To put it more simply, do we not have to admit that they come together in a restoration of the dimension of the *other*, which totalitarianism tries to suppress with its representation of the People-as-One?

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We have until now been asking how we can conceive the links between the religious and the political, and the possibility of their being broken. But is this the appropriate language to use? Is there any sense in trying to apprehend the religious as such by extracting it from the political and then specifying its efficacy in one or another form of society? Or, to be more specific, and since the scope of our investigation has from the beginning been restricted, are we entitled to refer to an essence of Christianity and to relate certain features of modern political societies (that is, societies instituted since the beginning of the Christian era) to that essence? The question may be disconcerting insofar as Christianity is based upon a narrative, or a body of narratives, to which we are free to refer, whatever degree of veracity we may accord it, in order to identify it as a specific religion that appeared at a given epoch in the history of humanity. Even at this stage, however, we cannot ignore the fact that the birth of this religion has a political meaning. That fact was, of course, stressed and discussed by theologians for centuries, long before Dante based his apologia for a universal monarchy on the argument that the Son of God resolved to come to earth and to take the form of a man at a time when humanity was united under the authority of the Roman emperor, who was, metaphorically, the emperor of all humanity—and that, more specifically still, He resolved to do so at a time when the first census of all the emperor's subjects was being carried out. It is, however, more pertinent to note that one cannot derive the principles of a political order from the sacred texts. Attempts to do so were made over and over again, but the point is that they involved digressions through multiple and often contradictory interpretations. The new religion reformulates the notion of a duality between this world and the next, and between man's mortal destiny and his immortal destiny; it depicts a mediator who is a God-made-man. It is believed to bring together not only one people but the whole of humanity; the body of Christ symbolizes the unity between men and God, and the union of all men in the authority. Christ lives on in a Church of which he is simultaneously the head. The very fact that the event of his birth took place at a specific time and in a specific place indicates that he was born to be the new Adam. A link is established between the idea of the fall

and the idea of redemption, and thus makes tangible the historical dimension of the divine. All these themes lend themselves to political elaborations, but their meaning is in itself uncertain. It is when a definite relationship is established between a certain type of political institution and a certain type of religious institution that the religious basis of the political order becomes legible, as does the political basis of the Church, for the Church ceases to merge with Christian humanity and is circumscribed within a space, organized under the aegis of a power, and imprinted on a territory.

Let us now, then, qualify a formula that appeared to take us to the heart of the problem. We asked ourselves whether religious belief might not have been transferred onto philosophical thought at the very moment when the latter claimed to be able to discern the persistence of the religious in the political; whether, in short, it might not have misrecognized itself by misrecognizing the meaning of the new society that began to take shape in the last century. It might be more accurate to ask: Does not this thought bear the imprint of a theologico-political schema? Is it not because it is secretly governed by a curious identification with the *royalty of the spirit* that it is drawn to the One?

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The work of Michelet appears to me to provide the perfect justification for asking this question. He is not, of course, a "philosopher" in the sense in which scholars understand that term, but the reader has already been warned that we are not using it in its restrictive sense. The fact is that he does not belong to the species "scientific historian," which had yet to come into being; his history is interpretive and is bound up with an investigation into the meaning of humanity's development and, more specifically, into the political and religious revolution that he thought was going on before his very eyes, despite the forces that were trying to hinder it or to reverse its course. I find his thought exemplary because it testifies to a debate that we rarely see taking place within the mind of one man. His initial stance is to espouse and combine two conceptions that see the Revolution as being heir to the work already accomplished by Christianity and by the monarchy, respectively. Breaking with this inspiration, he then makes a radical critique of the ancien régime as a theologico-political formation, whose destruction was inaugurated by the Revolution. But his critique is such that it re-exploits seemingly discredited theologico-political categories to make an apologia for modernity. Yet this very operation, and we may well wonder to what extent it is conscious or unconscious, brings him up against the idea of a right or a freedom that can found itself, the idea of a humanity that displays signs of its self-transcendence, of a heroism of the spirit (the expression is an early borrowing from Vico), of an infinite questioning of any given configuration of knowledge.

The movement that takes us from the *Introduction to a Universal History* or the *Origins of French Law [droit]* to the *Bible of Humanity* or the 1869 Preface to the *History of France* via *The French Revolution* describes a trajectory in which we find a constant tension

between the idea that religion is the ultimate horizon of human life and the idea that right [*droit*] is the ultimate source of human self-creation or, to be more accurate, that right is an internal principle that allows human beings to transcend themselves. These two ideas determine, respectively, the notion of having roots in a place and a time—the notion of tradition and of an identity between self and being (people, nation, humanity)—and the notion of the rootlessness, the wandering, and the turmoil of being, the notion of a wild assertion of the self as being free from all authority, as being supported only by the work that is being accomplished.

It is obviously my intention not to summarize Michelet's itinerary but, by making a digression, to shed light on the question that concerns us here. Let us go back, then, to the starting point provided by the *Introduction to a Universal History*. What is its relevance? It is not that it reveals the author's originality. To put it briefly, it is a condensation of the interpretations of Guizot and Ballanche. The monarchy is seen as a leveling and centralizing agent, which has the virtue of creating conditions of equality and of making society increasingly homogeneous. Michelet sees in Christianity the advent of a religion of equality and fraternity, of a religion based upon a love of humanity. The idea that the old monarchy became useless once the construction of society had been completed is borrowed from Guizot; the idea that the spirit of Christianity has been invested in social institutions is borrowed from Ballanche. It is important to note that Michelet rapidly arrives at a double reading of the history of France, that he reads it in both religious and political terms. In his view, the distinctive feature of France is that the "feeling of social generality" was born in that nation. Despite inequality of condition and of morals, and despite the regional differences that survived until the Revolution, a people comes into being thanks to the double effect of a principle of material unification and a principle of spiritual unification. We will not dwell upon the formulas that signal France's pre-eminent role in "bringing heaven to earth"; a few examples will suffice: "the moral world found its Word in Christ, the son of Judaea and of Greece, and France will explain the Word to the social world"; France's role is to "break the news of this new revelation"; France speaks "the Word of Europe" and holds "the pontificate of the new civilization." We will, however, pick out at least this judgment, which he will later invert: "The name of the priest and the king, of the representatives of what is most general, that is, most divine in the thought of a nation lent, as it were, the obscure right of the people a *mystical envelope* in which it grew and became stronger" (emphasis added).

In *The French Revolution*, Michelet transforms this "mystical envelope" into an illusion: he completely divorces right and justice from the name of the king and the priest, who are now seen as concealing them in order to stifle them. And yet he still finds the basis of ancien régime society in the "priestly monarchy." Indeed, if we are to believe his own account, his conversion to the struggle against Christianity and his decision to write his *Revolution* originated in something similar to a religious revelation. The authenticity of the scene he reconstructs in 1869 is irrelevant; it is an admirable illustration of how

symbols change place in the construction he himself built and of how that construction survives despite inversions of meaning.

His *History of France* had, he tells us in the Preface, brought him to the threshold of the "monarchical ages" when an "accident" upset his plans.

One day when I was passing through Reims, I saw the magnificent cathedral, the splendid Coronation Church, in great detail. When one walks around the internal gallery eighty feet above the ground, one sees the ravishing wealth of its flowery beauty as a permanent alleluia. In this empty immensity, one always seems to be able to hear the great official clamor that was once called the voice of the people . . . I reached the last little tower. There, I found a spectacle that astonished me greatly. The round tower was garlanded with sacrificial victims. One has a rope around his neck; another has lost an ear. The mutilated are sadder than the dead. How right they are! What a terrifying contrast! The church of festivals, the bride, has adopted that lugubrious ornament for her wedding necklace! The pillory of the people has been placed above the altar. But might not those tears have fallen down through the vaults and onto the heads of the kings? The tearful unction of the Revolution, of the wrath of God. "I will not understand the monarchical ages," I said to myself, "unless I first establish within me the soul and the faith of the people, and, after *Louis XI*, I wrote my *Revolution*. (1845-53)

This astonishing description is more eloquent than many historically or theoretically based arguments, and it does more than they ever could to help us understand the position Michelet adopts to mount his attack on the theologico-political. Where is his position? Inside the cathedral of the coronation, the very place where Christian France was shaped and then reshaped. It is there that he takes up his position; indeed, he explores it thoroughly. He ascends its heights, just as the souls of the kings were believed to ascend to take their place at the side of God, to the acclamation of the people, and, in this new liturgy, his thought takes its place at the side of the people. Michelet moves through the church like an actor. He makes it undergo a true metamorphosis, but he is still there. He watches the king being crowned, but he secretly transforms the coronation into a deposition so as to reveal a second coronation that, so to speak, reduplicates it. He uses all the old symbols: the coronation, the acclamation that welcomes the elect into the communion of saints, the marriage between the Church and Christ, between the kingdom and the king, the sacrificial victim, the cross that stands above the altar, the unction that raises the king head and shoulders above his assembled subjects. But for Michelet the coronation is that of the people. It is the true voice of the people that he hears in the nave; he imagines the celebration of a different marriage; the garland of sacrificial victims replaces the martyred Christ; the pillory stands above the altar; tears replace the sacred liquor; the Lord's anointed becomes the anointed of the Revolution, which becomes God's epic poem. And,

it must be added, he becomes sensitized to a time that, while it does not exist outside time, does not exist within time either: the time of a people, of the people who await their incarnation, who are in a sense always invisible, but who reveal themselves for one moment in history—and who demand faith.

It must not be believed that the scene in Reims Cathedral is simply a phantasmagoria; it is a condensation of many of the themes that determine the intellectual work which went into *The French Revolution*. It is not necessary to identify all the references, even though they are explicitly religious. The image of the Church appears in both the 1847 and 1869 prefaces. Michelet's reply to those who mourn the fact that the Revolution could not use the spirit of the Reformation to combat Catholicism is that it adopted no Church for the very good reason that "it was itself a Church" (a criticism addressed specifically to Quinet, although he is not mentioned by name). Michelet's reply to those who criticize his book and claim to be the heirs of the Girondins or the Jacobins is that he is reluctant to argue with them because he "did not want to destroy the unity of the great Church." But the mystical conception of the Revolution is at least as important as the words themselves, if not more so. The Revolution was, of course, an event that occurred in a specific place, but, as he writes at one point and as he constantly suggests, "it knew nothing of time or space." The event was modeled on Christ's appearance on earth. It bears witness to the fullness of time, to use St. Paul's expression, but it also abolishes time. It inaugurates an era, but it escapes all temporal determination and represents a spiritual unity that allows humanity to accede to its own presence. In that sense, it proves to be indestructible, to exist outside the field of continuing political battles, and to condemn all attempts to restore the old order as being in vain. With the Revolution, humanity rises above itself, and henceforth it is only from these new heights that it can relate to itself and survey the vicissitudes of its history. When he analyzes the Fête de la Fédération, Michelet adopts the language of the theologian, and speaks of it as though it were France's marriage with France, as though it were modeled on the marriage between Christ and the Church or that between the king and the kingdom. And when he returns to the theme of humanity's search for its own body, he evokes the moment when the world said to itself: "Oh, if only I were one. . . . If only I could at last unite my scattered members, and assemble my nations." And when, in the 1869 Preface, he returns to 1790, he adds: "No other *agape*, no other communion was comparable to this." In the same passage, he turns the war of 1792 into a "holy war." We saw then "the absolute, infinite nature of sacrifice." This is enough for him to refute once more Quinet's thesis that the Revolution could not find new symbols: "Faith is all; form counts for little. What does it matter how the altar is draped? It is still the altar of Right, of Truth, and of Eternal Reason. Not a stone from it has been lost, and it waits peacefully."

It is the establishment of certainty and the new relationship that has been forged between certainty and revelation, which bear witness to the reinscription of Michelet's thought within the matrix of the Christian religion. But we must never lose sight of the

fact that the monarchical reference is combined with a Christological reference. Michelet does not simply adopt the notion of a duality between the temporal and the nontemporal, transpose it onto a new register, and link it to an event that allows the nontemporal to be read within the temporal; he reappropriates the image of the king and the idea of the sovereignty of the One in order to celebrate the people, spirit or reason, and justice or right. Like the Revolution, the people are divided in their existence. Insofar as the people exist within time and space, they can appear fallible, divided, or even despicable, as when they take on the features of "mob rule" or "popular caprice," as when they adopt the gross gesticulations of the parvenus of the Paris Commune, and as when they grotesquely allow themselves to be ruled by "buffoons": they can become "the most dangerous of judges" when they are "in ferment" (the references are to the chapter on the trial of Louis XVI). In their atemporal existence, they win their true identity and reveal themselves to be infallible and at one with themselves, to be in legitimate possession of an absolute right. And when they take on this status, they occupy the position of the king. Michelet is not indulging in rhetoric when he says that, as a historian, he has taken the "royal road" and comments that: "to me, that word means popular" (book 3); in raising the question of the legitimacy of the condemnation of Louis XVI, he is asserting that "the people are all" and designating "the true King: the people." One cannot fail to see in certain of these formulas a resurgence of the theologico-political myth of the double nature of the king.

The repeated eulogies to right as the sovereign of the world (a formula borrowed from Rousseau) are equally significant, as is the moment when, in the course of his pitiless description of the wrong-doings of the priestly monarchy, Michelet elevates Buffon, Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Rousseau to the status of the founding fathers of the new humanity (he even calls them "the great doctors of the new Church") and when, reappropriating an expression whose illusory effects he never ceases to denounce, he elevates "royalty of spirit" above the world. We see here the workings of the transference to which we referred earlier. "Until then, unity had been based upon the idea of a religious or political incarnation. A human God, a God made flesh, was required to unite Church and State. Humanity was still weak, and placed its union under the sign, the visible sign, of a man, an individual. From now on, unity will be purer, and will be freed from this material condition; it will lie in the union of hearts, in the community of the spirit, in the profound marriage of feelings that joins each to all." A more detailed analysis of Michelet's language would further reveal a symbolic architecture which is very similar to that elaborated at the end of the Middle Ages, an architecture which placed the king in a position to be a sovereign mediator between justice and people, and justice in a position to be a sovereign mediator between reason and equity.

As we have already said, the fact that we find in Michelet's thought the imprint of the theologico-political he is so determined to destroy does not, however, discredit his interpretation of the mutation that occurred in the transition from ancien régime to

Revolution. He is one of the few thinkers of his day to recognize the symbolic function of power in shaping social relations. Anyone who doubts that this is so has only to read or reread the introduction to *The French Revolution*, a veritable essay in political philosophy, whose major insight seems to me to have lost none of its acuity, despite the fragility of the historical reconstruction. Compared with that made by Tocqueville, Michelet's analysis of the ancien régime may, of course, seem summary and sociologically poor. But we do not have to choose between them, and the difference between them is not that between an ideological history and a conceptual history. In fact, Michelet sees and tries to conceptualize something that escapes Tocqueville's thought. The latter notes every sign of the gradual centralization of the state and of the increasing equality of condition, and interprets them as proof that society is indeed being transformed, despite the seeming permanence of its order. It could not be said that he is insensitive to the symbolic dimension of the social. In one sense, it does not escape him, for, rather than the de facto growth of equality and centralization, it is, I believe, the establishment of a principle of similarity governing both conduct and morals and the establishment of the *point of view of the state* that attracts his attention. But it is precisely because he erects this into a model—an ideal model whose coordinates in time and space are never defined—that he loses interest in the figure of power and tends to reduce the history of the ancien régime to the breakup of aristocratic society to such an extent that the new society appears to be no more than the final product of that process, and the Revolution becomes unintelligible except insofar as it designates the moment of a flight into the imaginary. Michelet, by contrast, decodes the symbolic by transposing it onto another register; within this register, the mainspring behind domination and behind the organization of institutions is, as he puts it, the most *obscure* and the most *intimate* element in the position and representation of power (and let me repeat that one cannot exist without the other). He expresses his views most clearly when, having drawn up a balance sheet of the state of France on the eve of 1789, having noted that "I see the Revolution everywhere, even at Versailles," having judged inevitable and visible to all "the defeat of the nobility and the clergy," and having described the boldness and blindness of Calonne, he concludes: "The only obscure question was that of royalty. This is not, as it has so often been said, a question of pure form, but a fundamental question, a question more intimate and more perennial than any other question in France, a question not only of politics, but of love and of religion. No other people so loved their kings." This interest in the obscure, the profound, and the primal, which inspires all Michelet's works from *The Origins of French Law* to *The Sorcerer*, helps him to discover something that Tocqueville fails to see: the mystery of the monarchical incarnation. Beyond the conscious representation of a divine-right king whose power restores something of the presence of Christ and thereby makes justice appear in his person, there lies an unconscious representation of a society embodied in a king, of a society whose political institutions are not simply ordered in accordance with a "carnal principle" but whose members are so captivated by the image of a body that

they project onto it their own union, that their affects are precipitated in an amorous identification with that body. If we read him carefully, we find that Michelet in fact combines two arguments that, while they are connected, do not overlap.

The first relates the political law of the ancien régime to religious law—indeed, it would not be going too far to say that the one is derived from the other. Christianity proves to be both the system that shaped the monarchy and the body of institutions that supports it. This is in fact obvious from the very plan of the Introduction: the first part is entitled "Of Religion in the Middle Ages" and the second, "Of the Former Monarchy." Michelet therefore immediately formulates the question: "Is the Revolution Christian or anti-Christian? Logically and historically, this question comes before all others." And the answer is not long in coming: "On the stage, I still see only two great facts, two principles, two actors, and two persons: Christianity and the Revolution." He even goes so far as to assert: "All the civic institutions that the Revolution invented either emanated from Christianity, or were modeled on its forms and authorized by it." From this point of view, the schema is simple: Christianity is "the religion of grace, of free, arbitrary salvation, and of the good pleasure of God." The human monarchy is constructed in the image of the divine monarchy: both govern on behalf of an elect. Arbitrary power, masked as justice, has taken up its abode in society: it is found "with depressing regularity in political institutions." It is a "carnal principle" that supports social organization, the division between the orders, and the hierarchy of conditions; this is a principle that "puts justice and injustice in the blood, that makes them circulate along with the flux of life from one generation to the next." The theologico-political system is, he suggests, such that it glorifies love, the personal relationship that exists between man and God, between man and king; the spiritual notion of justice is materialized; love is put "in the place of law." To paraphrase freely, using the same terms that we used earlier: when the law is fully asserted and when divine might and human might are condensed within a single person, Law is imprinted upon power; Law as such is abolished; the motive behind obedience is no longer fear, but a loving submission to the monarch. At the same time, the obverse of the love demanded by Christianity is revealed to be its hatred of all who perturb order: "The incredible furies of the Church during the Middle Ages," the Inquisition, the books that were burned, the people who were burned, the history of the Vaudois and the Albigenses. Compared with that terror, the revolutionary Terror makes one smile. The love inspired by the king also has its obverse: torture, the Bastille, *lettres de cachet*, and the *Livre rouge*.

But Michelet's second argument, which first emerges in the articulation between the first and second parts of the Introduction, takes a different direction. The might of the king does not simply descend from the heights of Christian arbitrariness; it is also constructed by his subjects. It is they who built "this sanctuary, this refuge: the altar of the kingdom." It is they who invented "a series of legends and myths embroidered and amplified by all the efforts of genius: the holy king who was more of a priest than the priests himself in the thirteenth century, the knight-king in the sixteenth century, the good king

with Henri IV, the God-king with Louis XIV." In one sense, they are obeying the same inspiration as the great thinkers of the period, observes Michelet: Dante was similarly inspired to seek the salvation of humanity in unity and to imagine a monarch who, because he embodied the One, would possess unlimited authority and would be set free from mortal passions. But "we must dig deeper than Dante, we must dig into the earth, and uncover and contemplate *the profoundly popular basis on which the colossus was built*" (emphasis added). Men did not simply believe that they could "save justice in a political religion," and they did not simply create "a God of Justice out of a man"; they made kings the object of their love. Theirs was a singular love: "an obstinate, blind love, which saw all its God's imperfections as virtues. Far from being shocked at seeing the human element in him, they were grateful for it. They believed that it would bring him closer to them, that it would make him less proud and less harsh. They were glad that Henri IV loved Gabrielle." The remarkable thing about the description of this love, about the evocation of Louis XV, the "well-beloved," a God-made-flesh, and about the pages devoted to Louis XVI as he returns from Varenne to his execution is that they suggest that we have to re-examine the representation of the king's two bodies. This, as formulated in the Middle Ages, was based upon the notion of the two bodies of Christ and, in sixteenth-century England, generated the juridical fiction that the king was two persons in one, one being the natural king, a mortal man who was subject to time and to common laws, who was vulnerable to ignorance, error, and illness, and the other being the supernatural king, who was immortal, infallible, and omnipotent within the time and space of the kingdom. This representation gave rise to numerous commentaries by English historians, and Ernst Kantorowicz analyzes them with unrivaled erudition and subtlety.³ Michelet does not, of course, bring this out, but he does deal with the issue indirectly, and in such a way as to reveal the limited extent to which this representation can be formulated in juridical or theologico-political terms, even though it was primarily such a formulation that caught the attention of contemporaries. As we read Michelet, it becomes apparent that, over and beyond this representation, it is the natural body that, because it is combined with the supernatural body, exercises the charm that delights the people. It is insofar as it is a sexed body, a body capable of procreation and of physical love, and a fallible body that it effects an unconscious mediation between the human and the divine; the body of Christ, although mortal, visible, and fallible as well as divine, cannot ensure that mediation because, while it indicates the presence of God in man, it cannot fully indicate the converse: the presence of man and of the flesh in God. By breaking with the argument that derives the human monarchy from the divine monarchy, Michelet uncovers an erotico-political register. In his view, that register is, no doubt, established simply because religion has put love in the place of Law. But he does outline a logic of love in the political, and it is surprising that he does not see that it is older than Christianity. The modern king, who is portrayed as God's representative on earth, as a substitute for Christ, does not derive all his power from that image. It is through the operation of sacrifice alone, in the element

of suffering alone, that man becomes like God, identifies with Christ, and shuffles off his mortal coil. At this point, love values the king above life itself. And it is through the double operation of sacrifice and pleasure [*jouissance*] that the king's subjects experience rapture. Love both nourishes their life and justifies their death. It is the image of the natural body, the image of a God made flesh, the image of his marriage, his paternity, his liaisons, his festivals, his amusements, and his feasts, but also the image of his weaknesses or even his cruelties, in short, all the images of his humanity, that people their imaginary, that assure them that the king and the people are conjoined. A carnal union is established between the great individual and his mass of servants, from the lowliest to the most important, and it is indissociable from the mystical union between king and kingdom. According to theology and the jurists, the immortal king possesses the gift of clairvoyance as well as that of ubiquity, but, at the same time and even as he escapes the gaze of his subjects, he has the gift of attracting the gaze of all, of concentrating upon himself the absolute visibility of man-as-being: since he is a unique focal point, he abolishes differences between points of view and ensures that all merge in the One.

Michelet's extreme sensitivity to the enigma of the monarchical incarnation and of the role it gives to the natural body within the supernatural body is particularly evident in his analysis of the condemnation of Louis XVI. We will examine only those elements that are relevant to our purposes. The question of whether or not the trial should have taken place is not an issue for Michelet. It is obvious that it should have taken place. It had a double utility. On the one hand, it restored royalty to its rightful place—"within the people"—by making the people a judge; on the other, "it brought out into the light that ridiculous mystery which a barbarian humanity had for so long turned into a religion: the mystery of the monarchical incarnation, the bizarre fiction that the wisdom of the people is concentrated in an imbecile." Given that royalty was embodied in a man, the problem was to establish how the evil could be excised so as to destroy the incarnation and so as to prevent any man from ever becoming a king. The historian gives his answer immediately, and then supports it with numerous arguments. "Royalty had to be dragged into the broad light of day and exposed on all sides; and it had to be opened up to reveal what was inside the worm-eaten idol, to reveal the insects and worms inside the beautiful golden head. Royalty and the king had to be condemned usefully, judged, and placed under the blade. Did the blade have to fall? That is another question. When he merged with the dead institution, the king was no more than a head made of wood, empty, hollow, no more than a thing. If, when that head was struck, even a single drop of blood flowed, that was proof of life; people began to believe once more that it was a living head; royalty had come back to life" (book 9).

This penetrating analysis can be reformulated as follows: men regard royalty as a condensation of immortal life, and that life takes the form of a living man: the king. It has to be demonstrated that the symbol of life is the product of an illusion; belief has to be rooted out; and the idol has to be shown to be an idol. In short, the inner shadows of

this pseudo-visible entity have to be destroyed; he must be laid low and torn to pieces. That action alone will ensure that the living individual loses his life. The empty head of Louis XVI appears in the empty crown. If, on the other hand, Louis XVI is struck, and if his blood is shed in the belief that this will annihilate his body, it will be found that we have here a living man, and, given that this living man represents eternal life, royalty will be resurrected. In general terms, Michelet is trying to explain that, because royalty is embodied in a man, the royal phantasmagoria is revived when the man is turned into a spectacle. Hence his bitter commentary on the detention of Louis XVI in the Temple. It was believed, he suggests, that the deposition of the individual would have the effect of desanctifying him. On the contrary: "The most serious and the cruelest blow that could have been struck against the Revolution was the ineptitude of those who constantly kept Louis XVI before the eyes of the population, and who allowed him to relate to the population both as a man and as a prisoner." Why? Because the more he was revealed in his human singularity, and the more visible the living individual became, the more he remained a king. His sufferings inspired love even before he was executed, but beyond that love there lay, so to speak, *the attraction of the unique object of every gaze*. Michelet succeeds admirably in showing that Louis XVI appears to be unique precisely because he is so commonplace, because he is seen in the bosom of his family, a mere man amongst mere people, caught up in the insignificance of everyday life. All the signs that designate him to be a man restore his kingship.

I cannot refrain from pointing out the remarkable manner in which the writer portrays Louis XVI. He shows him to his readers, but he does so in order to prevent him from delighting the eye. He describes him as "ruddy-faced and replete," as eating too much over-rich food, as walking along with "the myopic gaze, the abstracted expression, the heavy gait, and the typical swaying walk of the Bourbons," and as giving the impression that he is "a fat farmer from the Beauce." By doing so, he does not make him any less commonplace, but his neutral observations do tend, as it were, to dissolve his individuality into a genre painting.

The crucial moment in the interpretation, however, concerns the execution. Michelet is not insensitive to the arguments of the Montagne, as it believes that it did have the merit of recognizing the imperative need to destroy the incarnation. The Montagne believed, "not without reason," he adds, that "a man is as much a body as a spirit, and that one could never be certain of the death of the monarchy until one had touched, felt, and handled it in the shape of the dead body of Louis XVI and his severed head." He suggests, in a sense, that if the people were to be elevated to the rank of royalty, they needed, perhaps, more than the image of the Law; they needed, perhaps, an image of punishment. But he also suggests that, while the imagination is not extinguished by the light of justice, nothing stimulates it more than the sight of a corpse. The blood of the dead man does not destroy the incarnation; it revives it. Royalty and religion are reborn at the very moment when the revolutionaries lapse into the illusion that sustained them: namely the

illusion that they were imprinted upon a real body. Such, then, are "the terrible effects of the legend of the Temple," of the legends that were unleashed by the execution:

The kings of the scripture are called Christs; Christ is called a king. There was not a single incident in the king's captivity that was not seized upon and translated into an episode in the Passion. The Passion of Louis XVI became a sort of traditional poem that peasants and women passed on by word of mouth: the poem of Barbarian France.

How can the thinker who is so devoted to rooting out beliefs that give rise to, sustain, or restore the mystery of the monarchical incarnation consent to their being transferred onto the sacred image of the People, the Nation, Humanity, and the Spirit? The problem would become more complex if we were to follow a further strand in Michelet's interpretation of the Revolution, but to do so would be beyond the scope of the present essay. These all too brief remarks must suffice: although he posits an antithesis between the ancien régime and the Revolution, Michelet is still blind to the internal contradictions of the Revolution. He sees Robespierre's acquisition of power as a resurrection of the monarchy (a process that began with the death of Danton, he notes in the 1868 Preface); he attacks the Jacobin doctrine of public safety by comparing it to the absolutist idea of reason of state and the Christian doctrine of salvation. He denounces both the Montagnards and the Girondins as arrogant intellectual elites ("There is a terrible aristocracy among these democrats"); he even goes so far as to say of Robespierre that "On the day that the director was revealed to be the future king of the priests [after the trial of the Mother of God], a reawakened France set him at the side of Louis XVI" (book 3). He wishes, we said, to ensure that the Revolution will not be confused with any one of its episodes, and to prevent it from being appropriated by any one clan; but, while he temporalizes it in one sense, in another he restores to it a temporality that cannot be mastered and describes its progress in such a way that the creation and destruction of men and ideas become indissociable; although he asserts the unity of the spirit of the Revolution, he sees it as being deployed in different places and as stirring up so many currents that he makes a distinction between a truly peasant revolution and an embryonic socialist revolution.

Perhaps the contrast between two of his formulas reveals just how ambiguous his conception of the Revolution is. Both, as it happens, have become famous: "History is resurrection" and "History is time."

. . .

The reader of the rapid sketch we have outlined cannot have failed to sense the weakness in Michelet's argument. When he derives the human monarchy from the divine monarchy

and political institutions from religious institutions, he is relying upon an outrageous simplification of Christianity. This does not invalidate his thesis that both types of institution are inscribed within single schema, but it is by no means proven that the latter are modeled on the former. As we have indicated, any such proposition presupposes that one can conceive of an essence of Christianity without taking into account the political fact. Michelet, in fact, half glimpses the arbitrary element in this hypothesis when he states that the Gospel contains no specific teachings: "Its vague morality," he concedes to his adversaries, "contains almost none of the doctrines that made Christianity such a positive, absorbing, and compelling religion and that gave it such a hold on men" (Introduction). He therefore makes it clear that he is taking as his object religion as it is fully instituted by Catholicism. As, however, he discovers that the theme of grace is the principle behind its doctrine, one might have expected him to take the phenomenon of Protestantism into consideration and to look at the mode of its insertion into modern political societies, rather than simply remarking in passing that it merely "formulates in harsher terms" the doctrine of the Catholic world. He remains silent about this point. When he outlines his major opposition between Christianity and revolution, he deliberately ignores events in America. It escapes his notice that it was the Puritans who founded free institutions in New England, and that they constantly referred to the Bible in their political proclamations, whereas his contemporary Quinet finds in the combination of Protestantism and freedom a lesson that has considerable implications for any understanding of modern democracy. Yet this lacuna in Michelet's argument, or rather, this occultation of a Puritan revolution, is relevant to our argument, not so much because it is a sign of his failure to understand or recognize the true nature of Christianity as because we can see in it an index of his determination to circumscribe the efficacy of the religious. Michelet's purpose is, of course, to show how Christianity shaped the European monarchies and, more specifically, the French monarchy. It should, however, also be noted that, while Quinet is careful to distinguish between Christianity and Catholicism, and even to stress the liberating virtues of Protestantism, he has no more insight than Michelet into the specific efficacy of the religious. Also, for his part, he is looking for a formula for a new faith that can be invested in the People, in the Nation, in Humanity and, at the same time, in Right, or Justice, and Reason. It is also pertinent to ask whether the ideal of political freedom that is affirmed by the break with the values of the monarchical regimes might not, thanks to Puritan discourse, be able to coexist alongside a definite increase in conformism at the level of opinions and morals, and whether, in that sense, it might not coexist with a new disavowal of the effects of the social division that sets democracy free. It is, in fact, as though, although they are working on different premises, the thinkers who are most alert to the advent of modernity and to the irreversibility of the course of history (and, in the case of France, I am not thinking only of Michelet and Quinet, but also of liberals like Guizot and Tocqueville and of socialists like Leroux) all looked to the religious for the

means to reconstitute a pole of unity that could ward off the threat of the breakup of the social that arose out of the defeat of the ancien régime.

. . .

This, then, is the question to which we return after our digression through Michelet's problematic and which we must now reformulate. Rather than attempt to redefine relations between the political and the religious in order to assess the degree to which one is subordinated to the other and to examine the question of the permanence or nonpermanence of a sensitivity to religious thought in modern society, might it not be more appropriate to posit the view that a theologico-political *formation* is, logically and historically, a primary datum? We might then be able to see in the oppositions it implies the principle of an evolution or, if we prefer to put it this way, the principle of a symbolic operation that takes place in the face of events and to detect how certain schemata of organization and representation survive thanks to the displacement and transference onto new entities of the image of the body and of its double nature, of the idea of the One, and of a mediation between visible and invisible, between the eternal and the temporal. We would then be in a better position to ask whether democracy is the theater of a new mode of transference, or whether the only thing that survives in it is the phantom of the theologico-political.

If this is so, what we will discover is a network of determinations, of which the "priestly monarchy" supplies only one element, albeit a constituent element, and in which the development of city-states, urban corporations, and trade guilds, and the exploitation of the heritage of classical humanism, all become caught up in their turn. We will also discover a dynamic schema imprinted upon the complex play of chiasmata that Kantorowicz analyzes with such subtlety. These are not, I repeat, chiasmata between the theological and the political, as his formulations sometimes suggest, but, if I may be forgiven the barbarism, between the already politicized theological and the already theologized political.

It need scarcely be stressed that this schema is legible only if we bear in mind the horizons of the real history in which take place changes in the economic, technological, demographic, and military realms, changes in the balance of power between the dominant actors, and changes in the categories of knowledge—and in that realm, the renaissance of Roman law and of ancient philosophy marks a decisive moment. If, moreover, we accept Kantorowicz's argument, that schema cannot be projected in its entirety onto empirical history, even though its articulations can be grasped within a temporal dimension. The four formations identified by the author—Christo-centric, juridico-centric, politico-centric, and humano-centric kingdoms—testify to a displacement of the representation of the king's two bodies, but what is displaced on each occasion is not eradicated and proves to contain the kernel of a future symbolic configuration. Thus, the fact that royalty is

originally supported by the image of Christ does not mean that it must abandon that image when the Christological reference loses its efficacy as a result, in part, of the strategy of the pope and his exclusive claim to be the Vicar of Christ. Long after the disintegration of the tenth-century Othonian myth, the *Traité du sacre* written for Charles V explicitly makes him a substitute for Christ, and indeed, as Michelet rightly notes, Louis XVI could still benefit from that identification. Similarly, the fact that in the age of Frederick II and Bracton the representation of the king is firmly supported by that of Justice and Right should not make us forget that a veritable religion of Right was reformulated in the sixteenth century and that it contains within it elements of a future system in which the body politic or the kingdom will appear to be the sacred body of the king. Nor should we forget that when, in his *De Monarchia*, Dante paints a portrait of an emperor who, insofar as he possesses a universal authority, can represent the One and can therefore represent the coming together of humanity as a body, despite the multiplicity of its members and the sequence of generations, his theologico-political vision of humanism cannot be explained away in terms of contemporary conditions (still less can it be reduced to a nostalgic longing for empire). Dante's vision was prefigured by the lengthy labors of the Italian jurists, and it will be reactivated in the period of Charles IV, Elizabeth, Francis I and Henry III. When imperial ambition is combined with a universal language, the ideas of the *De Monarchia* and the double figure of Augustus and Astra, of might and justice, will be exploited anew and will be used to promote the edification of a new monarchy and the conquest of the world. The essentials remain unchanged: the theologico-political is revealed in the deployment of a system of representations whose terms may be transformed, but whose oppositional principle remains constant.

When royalty is made by the institution of unction and coronation, it is possible for the king to argue the case for a sovereignty that removes him from the rest of humanity, that allows him to be a Vicar or minister of Christ, to seem to have been made in his image, and to have both a natural, mortal body and a supernatural, immortal body. At the same time, it is possible for the pope, who controls the rite of coronation, to seize the emblems of the monarchy and to imprint his power on the temporal realm (and this possibility was later realized through the Gregorian reforms and in the dispute over investitures). When, in an attempt to undo the imbrication of secular and priestly functions that came about as a result of the sanctification of royalty, the Church acquires the strength to circumscribe its domain and to become a functional body modeled on the emergent states, it tries to differentiate itself radically from all other political entities and to preserve its spiritual mission by claiming to be a mystical body (*corpus Ecclesiae mysticum*)—the very body of Christ, who also represents its head. At the same time, a religious vocation is reimprinted on the kingdom, which defines itself as a mystical body (*corpus Republicae mysticum*)—the body of the king, who also represents its head. When the reexploitation of Roman law and of Aristotelianism provides theology and political theory with a new conceptual framework, the ancient concepts of *imperium*, *populus*,

communitas, patria, perpetuitas, and aevum (a notion intermediate between that of time and that of eternity) are reworked to represent, in their respective registers, a new relationship between the *particular*, which is still inscribed within the limits of a body, of an entity that is organized spatially and temporally, and the *universal*, which is still related to the operation of transcendence. The ideas of reason, justice, and right, which inspire both a return to the principles of classical thought and a movement toward a secularized ethic, are themselves caught up in a theologico-political elaboration. The prince (and we have already alluded to this event) comes to occupy the position of the mediator between Justice and his subjects; the old Roman definition of the emperor as being at once above the laws and subject to Law is modified to put him in that position; he appears to be both his own superior and his own inferior; grace makes him divine, but his nature makes him human. He both institutes and reveals justice, and is both its vicar and its image within the state—and, symmetrically, Justice, like Christ, becomes an object of worship, and insinuates itself into a position in which it can mediate between sovereign reason and equity, between a substitute for divine law and a substitute for human law.

Particular attention should be paid to the series of divisions that accompanies and sustains the representation of bodies, a representation that was originally inspired by the model of Christ. Not only can they be substituted for one another, they support one another. The principle of the schema is, let me repeat, established when a new kind of royalty is instituted by the rite of coronation. As Marc Bloch demonstrates, we are now in the presence of a complex phenomenon that calls into question both the status of temporal power and the status of spiritual power . . .⁴ When the king is blessed and crowned as the Lord's anointed, his power is spiritualized, but, although he is the earthly replica of Christ, he differs from his model in that, while grace makes him divine, his nature makes him human. It is not simply that he cannot truly take the place of the sacred one (and no doubt no one has ever been able to do so), it is also that his person makes visible both the union of natural and supernatural, and the division between them. Despite the attempts made by the Othonian emperors, the path to a complete identification with a God-made-man remains blocked. At the same time, the king comes up against another earthly force: the priest, from whose hands he receives his rank, and who is in a position to claim to be his superior. The division of the body of the king therefore goes hand in hand with the division between royal (or imperial) and papal authority. What happens at the latter pole is equally significant, for the claim that the pope is superior to any temporal power is bound up with his ambition to imprint his own spiritual power on a territory. In that respect, it should be recalled that the circumstances surrounding the pact signed between Pépin le Bref and Etienne II—the first pact between a pope and a king—are not anecdotal; they have a symbolic significance. Pépin converts his father's bid for power into an act of usurpation: he asks the Church to establish the basis of his legitimacy. Etienne, for his part, tries to enlist the king's help in seizing the Exarchate of Ravenna by exploiting a forged document—the so-called Donation of Constantine, which

surrenders Rome's possessions into his hands. A doable fraud is thus covered up by a new combination of religious law and human law. The new formation is indeed theologico-political through and through, by which I mean that it is determined by a double struggle for power. It is, however, even more important to note that we can from the outset discern two simultaneous movements toward a universal authority that is both scriptural and temporal. But neither can be carried through to completion: unrestricted political domination is impossible, and so is the creation of a theocratic monarchy.

The fragmentation of authority that is characteristic of feudal organization, by contrast, has the result of outlining the position of a king who, within the framework of a limited territory, appears to have no superiors—that is, no temporal superiors—and who is defined as being an emperor within his own kingdom (*imperator in suo regno*). And it is at the very moment when this claim is being so clearly asserted—in, that is, the mid-thirteenth century in both France and England—that the monarchical configuration begins to be deployed in its Western singularity.

The work of inscribing power and laws within a territory, the delineation of a political society with definite frontiers, and the winning, within that space, of the allegiance of all to the authority of the king are accompanied by the process of the sanctification and spiritualization of the kingdom. The process of secularization and laicization, which tends to deprive the Church of its temporal power within the framework of the state and which tends to include the national clergy within the community of the kingdom, is paralleled by the process of the incorporation of those religious representations that are capable of investing a “natural” space and social institutions with a mystical signification. Throughout the fabric of society, a division is effected between the realm of the functional and the realm of the mystical, though, given that it is revealed in terms of that representation, it would be more accurate to speak of it being effected throughout the fabric of the *body politic*. The division of the body politic occurs together with the division of the king's body; at the same time, the body politic is part of his body; his immortal and supernatural body remains that of a person whom race makes divine and in whom God dwells but, at the same time, it migrates into the body of the kingdom; while a single body is defined both as the body of a person and as the body of a community, its head remains the symbol of a transcendence that can never be effaced. Thus, in the famous essays he devotes to the reign of Philippe le Bel, Joseph Strayer shows how the conquest of the unity of political society under the slogan “defense of the kingdom” succeeds in mobilizing religious affects—the defense of the kingdom is a continuation of the defense of the kingdom of Christ; a feeling for the earthly fatherland replaces a feeling for the heavenly fatherland; the warriors who sacrifice their lives become brothers to the crusaders who fell in order to deliver Jerusalem and who were promised to the glory of God.⁵ The historian reveals how the figure of the warrior king becomes that of the Most Christian King, just as the territory is transformed into a *holy land*, and the mass of subjects into a chosen people (see his essay “The Most Christian Country, the Chosen People, and the Holy Land”). It

is pointless to dwell upon precisely how the Roman notions of *patria*, *communitas*, and *populus* are reactivated and reshaped within a religious symbolic; I would simply like to draw attention to what is by now a well-known phenomenon: the installation of representations of the People, the Nation, the Fatherland, of Holy War and of the salvation or safety [*salut*] of the state, within the theological configuration of the medieval monarchy. With reference to Kantorowicz's analyzes, it would be no less instructive to examine the process inaugurated in the twelfth century whereby a public domain becomes detached from the person of the king and is defined as a domain of inalienable property, and whereby a further division is introduced between reference to an objective order and reference to a sacred order: the *res publica* becomes a *res sacra* modeled on the possessions of the Church, which are themselves the property of Christ. The crown and the treasury are placed beneath a pole of impersonality that will later become the pole of the state and, thanks to the same inversion of signs, are defined as persons, as mystical bodies. (Bracton even ventures to define the king as the Vicar of the Treasury, in accordance with the model of the Vicar of Christ.)

Finally, it would also be appropriate to re-examine the relationship that was established between the notion of a power that is confined to a limited territory and a restricted community (a notion unknown in the period of the empire), and the notion of a power that has a vocation for universal domination. And it would be appropriate to re-examine the symmetrical relationship that was established between the notion of a kingdom, a nation, and a people that are accorded a definite identity, and the notion of a land and a community in which humanity is imprinted and embodied in a privileged manner. The formula that makes the king an emperor in his own kingdom contains a contradiction: it makes a gesture toward both an unlimited authority and a limited authority; it indicates that modern monarchs' tacit acceptance that their might is restricted by the might of others has not done away with the fantasy of imperial might—a fantasy that has been revived again and again throughout the ages. And this contradiction drifts into the framework of the kingdom; it is as though empirical frontiers are conceivable only if the kingdom finds itself to be entrusted with universal values. In order to appreciate its full import, we would perhaps have to elucidate it further by re-examining the role played by the idea—which receives its initial impetus from Dante—that humanity will become *one* and will live in peace under the sole authority of the *One*, an idea that combines the power of the spirit or sovereign reason with political power. This idea was strongly challenged by those who saw humanism as providing the basis for a critique of the temporal monarchy—a critique that began to be formulated by the end of the fourteenth century in Florence and that spread throughout Europe in the sixteenth—but it may also be worth asking whether it might not have retained its theologico-political efficacy in the realm of philosophy, and whether it might not resurface whenever philosophy attempts to reformulate the principle of what, following Michelet, we have termed the royalty of spirit.

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What conclusions are we to draw from this brief incursion into the theologico-political labyrinth? That we must recognize that, according to its schema, any move toward immanence is also a move toward transcendence; that any attempt to explain the contours of social relations implies an internalization of unity; that any attempt to define objective, impersonal entities implies a personification of those entities. The workings of the mechanisms of incarnation ensure the imbrication of religion and politics, even in areas where we thought we were dealing simply with purely religious or purely profane practices or representations.

If, however, we look back at the democratic society that began to take shape in the nineteenth century and that the philosophers and historians of the period were exploring, do we not have to agree that the mechanisms of incarnation were breaking down? The disincorporation of power is accompanied by the disincorporation of thought and by the disincorporation of the social. The paradox is that any adventure that begins with the formulation of a new idea of the state, the people, the nation, or humanity has its roots in the past. In that sense, Tocqueville has more reason than he might suspect to denounce the illusion that the French Revolution was a radical beginning and to want to reconstruct the prehistory of democracy. Although we have been able to do no more than allude to the fact, there was at the time of the Renaissance a humanism tinged with a political religiosity, and Michelet could still find traces of it, almost without realizing it. Far from leading us to conclude that the fabric of history is continuous, does not a reconstruction of the genealogy of democratic representations reveal the extent of the break within it? And so, rather than seeing democracy as a new episode in the transfer of the religious into the political, should we not conclude that the old transfers from one register to the other were intended to ensure the preservation of a *form* that has since been abolished, that the theological and the political became divorced, that a new experience of the institution of the social began to take shape, that the religious is reactivated at the weak points of the social, that its efficacy is no longer symbolic but imaginary, and that, ultimately, it is an expression of the unavoidable—and no doubt ontological—difficulty democracy has in reading its own story, as well as of the difficulty political or philosophical thought has in assuming, without making it a travesty, the tragedy of the modern condition?

—Translated by David Macey

2. Ibid., 238.
3. Ibid., Sermon 17 (DW 21, W 97), 182.
4. Ibid., Sermon 5 (DW 53, W 22), 129.
5. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite, "Mystical Theology," in *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology*, trans. John D. Jones (Milwaukee, Wisc.: Marquette University Press, 1980), 221.
6. Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1995), 64.
7. Here, of course, is where different mystical currents start to diverge. Is the experience that of the Oneness of God Himself, or that of an expression of God? For our argument in this essay, the debate about dualism, monism, and pantheism is not really relevant. Let me just say in passing that, from the viewpoint of the logic of mystical discourse, pantheism is the only ultimately coherent position.
8. Eckhart, Sermon 16 (DW 12, W 57), 177-78.
9. Ibid., Sermon 4 (DW 30, W 18), 123.
10. Jacob Korg, ed., *The Poetry of Robert Browning* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), 286. The following are some other examples of a theme that is quite common in mystical literature. Julian of Norwich refers to a small thing that he is beholding, the size of a hazelnut. And he asserts: "In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it: the second, that God loveth it: the third that God keepeth it. And what beheld I in this? Truly, the Maker, the Lover and the Keeper" (*The Revelation of Divine Love of Julian of Norwich*, trans. James Walsh, S.J. [London: Burns and Oates, 1961], 60). In his diary, George Fox sees in everything existing the "hidden unity in the Eternal Being." Commenting on that passage, Evelyn Underhill says: "To know the hidden unity in the Eternal Being—know it with invulnerable certainty, in the all-embracing act of consciousness with which we are aware of the personality of those we truly love—it is to live at its fullest the Illuminated Life, enjoying 'all creatures in God and God in all creatures'" (Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* [New York: Dutton, n.d.], 309).
11. Eckhart, "The Talks of Instruction," 9.
12. Ibid., 40.
13. The original formulation of this argument is to be found in Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985). I have developed various dimensions of the hegemonic relationship (especially in what refers to the relationship fullness/particularity) in the essays collected in *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 1996).

Claude Lefort, The Permanence of the Theologico-Political?

NOTE: This essay originally appeared in Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, trans. David Macey (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 213-55; reprinted by permission of the publisher.

1. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1894), 156-57.
2. This essay was first published in 1981 as "Permanence du théologico-politique?" in *Le Temps de la Réflexion* 2 (1981)—Ed.
3. Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).
4. Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch: Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France*, trans. J. E. Anderson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973).

5. Joseph Strayer, *Medieval Statecraft and the Perspectives of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

Marc de Wilde, Violence in the State of Exception: Reflections on Theologico-Political Motifs in Benjamin and Schmitt

1. Military Order on the Detention, Treatment, and Trial of Certain Non-Citizens in the War against Terrorism, November 13, 2001.

2. Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 3-4.

3. Walter Benjamin, "Zur Kritik der Gewalt," in Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. and introd. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 2.1:179-203; translated as Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 1913-1926, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 236-52. Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie: Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1996); translated as Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. and introd. George Schwab (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985). For these texts, page references will be given to both German and English versions in following notes, with the page number of the original language preceding the English one.

4. Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 197-212.

5. Jan-Werner Müller, *A Dangerous Mind: Carl Schmitt in Post-War European Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 35-41.

6. In a letter to Schmitt dated December 9, 1930, Benjamin writes: "You will soon notice how much the book [Benjamin's *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*] owes to your exposition of the doctrine of sovereignty" (in Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 1.3: 887). In a short curriculum vitae, Benjamin emphasizes the influence of Schmitt's analysis of the political and especially his "attempt to integrate phenomena . . . that only seemingly can be isolated according to fields" (in Siegfried Unseld, ed., *Zur Aktualität Walter Benjamins* [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972], 46). Jacques Derrida mentions another letter, in which Schmitt expresses his gratitude to Benjamin for writing "Critique of Violence" (in Jacques Derrida, *Force de Loi: Le "Fondement Mystique de l'Autorité"* [Paris: Galilée, 1994], 81; translated as Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" trans. Mary Quaintance, in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson [New York: Routledge, 1992], 29-30).

7. See Gérard Raulet, "Die Gemeinschaft beim jungen Marcuse," in *Intellektuellendiskurse in der Weimarer Republik: Zur politischen Kultur einer Gemengelage*, ed. Manfred Gangl and Gérard Raulet (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1994), 101, and Wolfgang Essbach, "Radikalismus und Modernität bei Jünger und Bloch, Lukács und Schmitt," in *ibid.*, 149-50.

8. The argument can be found, e.g., in Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Zeit der Ideologien: Eine Geschichte politischen Denkens im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1982), 154. See also Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

9. See Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 190-91 / 244, and Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1932), 37.

10. See Hent de Vries, *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 2.

experiences always in view, and by its tempo, compactness, density, yet also its tentativeness, to give them expression.

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Death of immortality. – Flaubert, said to have claimed to despise the fame on which he staked his life, was still as smug in the consciousness of such contradictions as the comfortably-off bourgeois who wrote *Madame Bovary*. Faced by corrupt public opinion and the press, to which he reacted in the same way as Kraus, he thought he could rely on posterity, a bourgeoisie delivered from stupidity, to give due honour to its authentic critic. But he underestimated stupidity: the society he represents cannot speak its own name, and as it has become total, so stupidity, like intelligence, has become absolute. This attacks the vital centres of the intellectual. He can no longer pin his hopes even on posterity without sinking into conformity, even if this were only agreement with great minds. But as soon as he abandons such hope, something blind and dogmatic comes into his work, prone to swing over to the other extreme of cynical capitulation. Fame resulting from objective processes in a market society, always fortuitous and often unsought, yet with an aura of justice and free choice, has been liquidated. It has become wholly a function of paid propagandists and is measured in terms of the investment risked by the bearer of a name or the interests behind him. The hired applauder, considered by someone as recent as Daumier as an excrescence, has now attained respectability as an official agent of the cultural system. Writers bent on a career talk of their agents as naturally as their predecessors of their publishers, who even then had a foot in the advertising business. They assume personal responsibility for becoming famous, and thus in a sense for their after-life – for what, in totally organized society, can hope to be remembered if it is not already known – and purchase from the lackeys of the trusts, as in former times from the Church, an expectation of immortality. But no blessing goes with it. Just as voluntary memory and utter oblivion always belonged together, organized fame and remembrance lead inevitably to nothingness, the foretaste of which is perceptible in the hectic doings of all celebrities. The famous are not happy in their lot. They become brand-name commodities, alien and incomprehensible to

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themselves, and, as their own living images, they are as if dead. In their pretentious concern for their aureoles they squander the disinterested energy that is alone capable of permanence. The inhuman indifference and contempt instantaneously visited on the fallen idols of the culture industry reveals the truth about their fame, though without granting those disdainful of it any better hopes of posterity. The intellectual, then, discovering his secret motive to be illegitimate, has no other remedy than to record his discovery.

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Morality and style. – A writer will find that the more precisely, conscientiously, appropriately he expresses himself, the more obscure the literary result is thought, whereas a loose and irresponsible formulation is at once rewarded with certain understandings. It awaits nothing, ascetically to avoid all technical expressions, all allusions to spheres of culture that no longer exist. Rigour and purity in assembling words, however simple the result, create a vacuum. Stoddiness that drifts with the flow of familiar speech is taken as a sign of relevance and contact people know what they want because they know what other people want. Regard for the object, rather than for communication, is suspect in any expression: anything specific, not taken from pre-existent patterns, appears inconsiderate, a symptom of eccentricity, almost of confusion. The logic of the day, which makes so much of its clarity, has naively adopted this perverted notion of everyday speech. Vague expression permits the hearer to imagine whatever suits him and what he already thinks in any case. Rigorous formulation demands unequivocal comprehension, conceptual effort, to which people are deliberately discouraged, and imposes on them in advance of any content a suspension of all received opinions, and thus an isolation, that they violently resist. Only what they do not need first to understand, they consider understandable; only the word coined by commerce, and really alienated, touches them as familiar. Few things contribute so much to the demoralization of intellectuals. Those who would escape it must recognize the advocates of communicability as traitors to what they communicate.

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The Death of Immortality?

Not all those who were exiled to Jersey after the Bonapartist coup d'état in the middle of the last century shared the same political sensibilities, but, perhaps more than anything else, it was the question of immortality that divided them. Indeed, that question itself had a political import. Astonishing as it may seem to us, in order to be a true republican, a true democrat or a true socialist, one either had to deny or affirm a belief in immortality. Victor Hugo and Pierre Leroux both had definite ideas on the subject, and saw those ideas as a precondition for the understanding and edification of the society of the future. Their discussions were acrimonious. The former expresses his irritation with the religion of humanity which dissolves the identity of the individual, absorbs him into a collectivity during his lifetime and discards him after his death. The latter amuses himself with rigged conversations with 'spirits'. The 'Philosophie' preface to *Les Misérables* and *La Grève de Sanarez*, which were both written a few years after the event, testify to their debates. Hugo appears to have abandoned the doctrine of metempsychosis in 1860, but he still clings to the belief in the migration of spirits: 'Space is an Ocean, and the worlds are islands. But there must be communications between the islands. These communications take the form of spirits being sent from one world to another.'¹ He allies his faith in 'The Being ... that miracle that cannot be enumerated' with the belief that the self is indestructible because 'it partakes of the indivisible'. He suggests that the humanity which the new prophets venerate has been reduced to its own devices, that it has been cut off from the world and from God, that it is 'an empty humanity. A spectre'. A long argument which leads itself to the fiction of a history from which freedom and responsibility have been banished lends him to conclude: 'Immortality; there we have the residue of the argument; something which survives and which is answerable; there we have the basis of the syllogism.'² This is as much a political conclusion as a philosophical or theological conclusion, since it implies that the extension of freedom increases the degree to which man is

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 responsible for what he was on earth:

The more you give life to do, the more you leave the tomb to do. The slave has no responsibilities; ultimately, he could die completely, and death would have nothing to say to him. The citizen, in contrast, is of necessity immortal, and he must be responsible. He was free. He has accounts to render. This is the divine origin of freedom.³

Hugo does not mention by name his adversaries, the upholders of the religion of humanity. But presumably Leroux is not his only target. He also finds repellant the wild imaginings of Comte or Enfantin. Not even Ballanche's *Palingénésie* finds favour in his eyes, even though it is inspired by a faith in a divine Creator. Ballanche is concerned solely with how humanity is reborn after its successive deaths.

As for *La Grève de Sanarez*, it expresses the conviction that theologians understand nothing of the doctrine of immortality, and that Leroux's 'illustrious neighbour' Hugo is too preoccupied with himself, his image and his art to understand the implications of the theory that all beings are interdependent.⁴ When he acts out his torments and raptures on the beach at Sanarez, Leroux quite happily summons up ghosts, questions them and makes them speak, but he shows no interest in converting his ecstasies into the force of real communication with spirits from another world. In a passage cited by Pierre Albouy, our author puts these words into the mouth of his interlocutor:

I converse with spirits. Your whole religion is false. ... Humanity, which you regard both as an ideal being and a real being, does not exist. It has never come to my tables. The future life is not what you say it is. ... I am not certain that we go to the stars; but I am greatly inclined to believe it.⁵

We will not describe Leroux's conception of immortality. He is careful not to define it, for, contrary to Hugo's suggestions, it is not an attribute of either a real or an ideal humanity. But we will at least point out that there is in his view no divide between the visible and the invisible; nothing invisible can be circumscribed within space – in the stars, as his friend Reynaud, with whom he quarrelled over this point, would say – or within time, in a future life divorced from our present life; no representation of immortality can be divorced from the experience of a human presence throughout history, from an initiation into speech through the use of reading and writing.

Our contemporaries may read Hugo the philosopher, Saint-Simon or Ballanche with interest – and not simply out of historical interest – but we can all agree that they will see their comments on immortality as mere curiosities.

They feel much more at home with Tocqueville, whose thought breaks with these wild imaginings and is already sociological. The fact is that in a chapter on individualism in the second volume of *Democracy in America* which was, it will be recalled, published in 1840 – Tocqueville compares aristocratic society and democratic society, and describes the transformation which occurs in their respective conceptions of time and of collective space. Aristocratic society was, he tells us, such that everyone had a rank and a station, and was caught up in a vast network of dependence: 'Aristocracy had made a chain of all members of the community, from the peasant to the king.'⁹ And the dominant notion was that time was immutable, that it existed outside any sequence of events or of individuals: 'As families remain for centuries in the same condition, often on the same spot, all generations become, as it were, contemporaneous.'¹⁰ This is enough to make us grasp the almost natural sense in which humanity understood immortality. As the author remarks in another chapter: 'Amongst the aristocratic nations of the Middle Ages generation succeeded generation in vain; each family was like a never dying, ever stationary man, and the state of opinions was hardly more changeable than that of conditions.'¹¹ The contrast with this model brings out the singularity of democracy: 'New families are constantly springing up, others are constantly falling away, and all that remain change their condition; the web of time is every instant broken and the track of generations effaced. Those who went before are soon forgotten; of those who will come after, no one has any idea.'¹² Tocqueville concludes his argument with this comment: 'Thus not only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him: it throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart.'¹³ The author in fact goes beyond this picture, which might suggest that the reactivation of the belief in immortality at the beginning of the nineteenth century is no more than a survival from the past. He investigates its nature and its function in democracy in two chapters entitled, respectively, 'Why some Americans manifest a Sort of fanatical spiritualism' and 'How religious belief sometimes turns the thoughts of Americans to immaterial pleasures'. He is struck first of all by the appearance of sects which endeavour to strike out extraordinary paths to eternal happiness, and by the popularity of religious insanity, and then by the true religiosity of the American people. His interpretation of the first phenomenon stems, in part, from what might be termed a sociological reflection. He argues, in substance, that the desire to escape the world is born of a search for well-being and that, in a democracy, that desire is heightened because men are not satisfied with the enjoyment of material goods, and 'feel imprisoned within bounds, which they will apparently never be allowed to pass.'¹⁴ As the majority allow themselves to be imprisoned within these bounds, the religious insanity of the minority intensifies: 'If ever the faculties of

the great majority of mankind were exclusively bent upon the pursuit of material objects, it might be anticipated that an amazing reaction would take place in the souls of some men. They would drift at large in the world of spirits, for fear of remaining shackled by the close bondage of the body.'¹⁵ Tocqueville adds: 'It is not, then, wonderful if in the midst of a community whose thoughts tend earthward a small number of individuals are to be found who turn their looks to heaven. I should be surprised if mysticism did not soon make some advance among a people solely engaged in promoting their own worldly welfare.'¹⁶ The reader might rightly wonder at the subtlety of the interpretation. The picture meets his intellectual expectations; mysticism appears on the fringes of a common ideal of worldly happiness; people react against the feeling that they are being swallowed up by the real by seeking the impossible in the here and now. But if we wish to discover Tocqueville's ideas rather than a projection of our own, we have to admit that his argument takes him beyond the framework of a sociological analysis. Between noting the religious insanity that accompanies the proliferation of bizarre sects and advancing the hypothesis of the rise of mysticism, he ventures a comment on human nature:

It was not man who implanted in himself the taste for what is infinite and the love of what is immortal; these lofty instincts are not the offspring of his capricious will; their steadfast foundation is fixed in human nature, and they exist in spite of his efforts. He may cross and distort them; destroy them he cannot.¹⁷

It might be said that we can explain away these lines by saying that Tocqueville's Christian convictions have overcome his scientific ambitions. But, even supposing that to be true, we have to ask ourselves whether it is permissible to draw a dividing line between his knowledge of democracy and the principles which allow him to discover within it the seeds of both the best and the worst, to uncover both the dynamic of democratic despotism and the dynamic of democratic freedom. That hypothesis does, however, appear to be debatable. The second chapter I mentioned contains an observation which in fact reappears several times in the work: 'The Americans show by their practice that they feel the high necessity of imparting morality to democratic communities by means of religion.'¹⁸ Here, we have to accept that a distinction is made between *religion* and *religious insanity*; the word 'religion' designates Christianity. And yet the comment brings out a truth with a universal import: 'What they think of themselves in this respect is a truth of which every democratic nation ought to be thoroughly persuaded.'¹⁹ This truth relates, not to the essence of Christianity, but to the nature of the human mind, which has to defend itself against the threat of its debasement. Tocqueville gives that threat

another name: materialism. This 'among all nations, is a dangerous disease of the human mind', but it is more especially to be dreaded in a democracy than in any other society. Tocqueville does of course take the view that Christianity is a higher religion. But it is because it is so deeply rooted in modern humanity that he clings to it: and, his own preferences notwithstanding, he is certainly not greatly interested in the nature of religious feelings. 'When, therefore, any religion has struck its roots deep into a democracy, beware that you do not disturb it': that is his view.¹⁷ He perceives, then, how dangerous it would be in his day to create a vacuum of belief by replacing one faith with another. Tocqueville is interested primarily in belief, rather than in the diversity of Christian religions or in the diversity of religions in general. In his view belief, whatever it may become, derives its truth from the same source in all regimes in a democracy: and, at bottom, that source is a belief in immortality. He is therefore not afraid to assert that: 'Most religions are only general, simple and practical means of teaching men the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. That is the greatest benefit which a democratic people derives from its belief, and hence belief is more necessary to such a people than to all others.'¹⁸ This is followed by an even more daring proposition, which finally blurs the distinction between 'religious insanity' and the Christian religion:

The doctrine of metempsychosis is assuredly not more rational than that of materialism; nevertheless if it were absolutely necessary that a democracy should choose one of the two, I should not hesitate to decide that the community would run less risk of being brutalized by believing that the soul of men is the carcass of a hog than by believing that the soul of man is nothing at all.¹⁹

Our contemporaries like Tocqueville: they believe that he has to be recognized as a very modern writer. *Democracy in America* attracts a wide readership, and is praised for its sobriety. On the other hand, the very few people who know *La Greve de Saintes* or the preface to *Les Misérables* have the impression that they are fanciful texts. And yet, should we not ask why it is that the sober Tocqueville can sympathize with equally fanciful ideas? It would in fact be an instructive exercise to ask the political scientists who know *Democracy in America* so well to read the following sentence, which is taken from the last chapter we discussed:

The belief in a supersensual and immortal principle, united for a time to matter is so indispensable to man's greatness that its effects are striking even when it is not united to the doctrine of future reward and punishment, or even when it teaches no more

than that after death the divine principle contained in man is absorbed in the Deity or transferred to animate the frame of some other creature. (emphasis added)²⁰

Would they be able to identify the author?

The Death of Immortality is the title of a fragment from *Minima Moralia*.²¹ At first sight, the formula is convincing. Note that Adorno does not place a question mark after it. He simply records the event. Without dwelling on his argument, which is less assured than the formula might suggest, let us at least provisionally accept a statement which appears to concur with the common sense of our time. 'The death of immortality, then – but is not the corollary of this that there is nothing but death? Or, rather, since we cannot speak of death without bringing into play the thought of death, nothing but the thought of death? It is rather difficult to accept this. Sociologists and historians have for a number of years been looking at changing attitudes towards death and, more specifically, at the change which appears to them to have characterized recent decades. The conclusion to be drawn from Philippe Ariès's pioneering, and rightly famous, study would appear to be this: the death of the idea of death.²² If he is to be believed, a mutation has occurred, and it is of a different order to all those mutations that punctuate the history of Western societies. He sums it up most adequately with the provocative formula: 'death inverted'.

The rituals which once accompanied the final event are no more. Death is no longer the drama which people once saw as setting the seal of destiny on a life. No more grandiose *mise en scène*; no more division of roles between the dying man, as he awaits his end and spends his time preparing for it, and his relatives and family. The spectacle of death seems, to say the least, to have been displaced, as have the ceremonial aspects of funerals and mourning. Following Gorer, who takes the view that death has been declared taboo and that the only other thing to have ever been subject to such a strict taboo is sexuality, Ariès notes our contemporary repugnance at anything that makes an exhibition of death, and even goes so far as indeed. The poetic death that allowed the dying to look down on the world of the living appears to have given way to a prosaic death: the ossification of death has given way to invisibility. Whereas death was once erected into a crucial moment in the family adventure or, more generally, the collective adventure, it is now private and solitary; whereas it was once personal and almost heroic, it is now anonymous. There are indeed many indications that our era has seen an attempt to dissolve the phenomenon into the banality of the quotidian. Whilst the dying are urged to pretend not to be dying, their relatives try to conceal their pain and mourning. It is as though everyone had to slip

away discreetly without disturbing the living, to coelude with the living in masking the void. Let me add that the new willingness of doctors – and this is commonplace in the United States – to inform their patients of the inevitability of their fate does not, despite appearances, alter the picture: telling someone who does not know he is condemned 'the truth' still indicates a desire to play down the drama; and in most cases, it indicates, not an obedience to a religious or moral imperative, but conformity to the rules of hygiene and bureaucracy. It places the patient under an obligation to accept his doctor's final orders, to make a clean death, to put his affairs in order, and to carry out the last duties society expects of him.

Does not this removal of drama imply a disavowal of death? Ariès frequently suggests that this is the case. And, at least at one point, he dares to express his own opinion: 'Technically, we accept that we might die, and we take out life insurance to protect our families from poverty. But deep inside, we feel that we are not mortal.'²³

Is it not, then, worth asking whether the disavowal of death and the disavowal of immortality might not in our day simply be two aspects of a single phenomenon? Far from replicating an illusion with a sense of reality, does not the loss of belief in immortality help to cover up a question which, until a very recent date, constantly haunted the human mind? But how can we say that? Anyone who reads Ariès can accept that death has become the object of a disavowal, even though he himself conforms to the new customs. No matter how little room we give the event, it cannot be abolished. We all see others die, and never doubt that we too will die. We know enough to retain some idea of what we refuse to accept. And, it has to be said: the books we are discussing have not caused a scandal. Indeed, they have sold well. But how can we hear the words *disavowal of immortality* without feeling an unreasonable urge to *assert* our immortality? If, as Ariès and Gorer state, the representation of death now seems obscene, the representation of immortality is even more obscene. The taboo on immortality seems to be total and unavoidable. Historical analysis does of course allow us to identify it as a taboo. But there is still a reluctance to conceive its object: the fact of immortality or of something non-mortal that goes by that name. We would certainly find no symmetry between a history of attitudes to death and a hypothetical history of attitudes to immortality. The historian of the former retains his freedom of judgement. Whilst he agrees that signs of a disavowal can be found in the practices of our time, he can also find a disavowal in the practices of the past: was not the pomp of death a way of concealing something that escapes representation and discourse? The historian of attitudes to immortality does not have the same freedom. The difficulty is that immortality appears to be essentially pompous: anyone who tried to reconceptualize it on the basis of his own experience would expose himself to ridicule. To cite Ariès once more: 'Deep inside, we feel that we are not mortal. He does not say 'that we are immortal'.

Is he not trying to allay our suspicions? Is he not trying to avoid the taboo? It is true that the negation of mortality is not equivalent to an assertion of immortality. But it is a gesture towards an unknown which ought to take a substantive form: towards a non-death.

To return to Adorno's formula: *the death of immortality*. The play on words is disturbing. It not only tells us that belief in immortality is no more; it also implies the absurd suggestion that immortality once existed. On reflection, however, it is not lacking in pertinence. For the fact is that the word has not been banished from our language; and the thought that it harboured has not been suppressed. True, we no longer believe in immortality, but we do not simply accept that it was once an object of human belief; we readily describe certain men, such as Homer, Dante and Shakespeare (and the three names were associated in significant fashion at the beginning of the nineteenth century), as immortal. It might be objected that we are using one word in place of another, and that we mean that they are unforgettable. In our eyes, the artists, writers, philosophers, statesmen and great soldiers whose names are engraved on humanity's memory are still immortal. We do not, of course, imagine that they dwell in the stars. But do we simply mean that their memory will never perish? We do not describe execrable heroes such as Nero or Attila as immortal, even though their names are familiar. Immortality is an attribute of figures whose words or deeds outlive their ephemeral effects, who seem, in one way or another, to have helped to shape the destiny of humanity. We also apply the word, defined in the same sense, to extraordinary events which we credit with having decided the meaning of history. It is also to be noted that certain of these immortal beings have a special privilege, whilst others had to win their immortality: these are the artists or writers whose language touches us, with whom we can commune across time, as though some element in time had not passed by, who are, as Pierre Leroux puts it, still present in their work. Is it the work, rather than the man, which remains immortal? For our purposes, that is irrelevant. If we replaced the word immortal by 'unforgettable' or 'im perishable', we would impoverish our language considerably. To do so would not remove the feeling that the book we are reading, the canvases we are looking at, or the sonata we are listening to is not dead. Then, then, is the paradox: at some point, immortality died, and yet it lives on, provided that it seems to be a property of beings or things from the past. How can we put it to death if it had its place? Its place is essentially invulnerable to the ravages of death, even though we claim that death now has total dominion over our world.

We want to get rid of absurdity. But absurdity is stubborn. If a belief in immortality is absurd, it was as absurd yesterday as it is today, and we have to admit that we cannot make allowance for it by accepting that things that come down to us from the past last indefinitely, and

then denying that the same is true when we apprehend the present and the future.

The astonishing thing is that we can accept the unthinkable provided that science dresses it up as a fact. Thus, we learn without being unduly disturbed that, wherever a trace of a human settlement, no matter how old, has been found, traces of some funeral ceremony have also been found. We readily agree that the notion of death is indissociable from human existence, even that it appears to be a constitutive element thereof, without drawing the obvious conclusion that this necessarily implies the notion of non-death. There is no need to have a profound knowledge of philosophy to understand that making a grave means primarily naming death and making a sign or a gesture which, minimal as it may be, evokes permanence and establishes a link that can never be broken between the visible and the invisible. 'Something in the place of nothing' ... we know how contemporary philosophy has dismissed the formula, but it cannot, of course, be divorced from an earlier representation: *someone in the place of nothing*. It can be read on the most fragile monuments erected by human beings to other human beings. And we must further admit that the gesture which creates the void also erects the monument, that by saying yes and no to death in the same breath, we create a Word. The living can no more recognize themselves as the authors of that Word than they can recognize themselves as the authors of their own deaths; yet the Word is as indestructible as death is inevitable. The deceased is a witness to the conjunction of the two. It does not matter how we establish the stages of his migration; it does not matter whether the final resting place we give him is in a specific place in the world, whence he will communicate with the living; whether it is in another world which will become his eternal home; or whether we simply hang his portrait on the wall in the family home; or whether we merely think of him – we always exhibit a wish to make something of the dead. The deceased begets duration. He creates substance. If we fail to embody him, humanity is dissolved into a time that has been pulverized.

It is not simply through communication between the living or through the interpenetration of their perceptions that the world is revealed to be a *common world*, an external world. And nor is it enough to say that it is because everyone can see, can be seen by others and is quasi-visible to himself, that he is imprinted on the being on to which it opens. The world is at once immutable and inexhaustible, absolutely present and beyond our present grasp, visible and invisible, unthinkable and thinkable, only because it arises from the fracture of death, only because, deep within it, it bears the mark of the division of death. Its institution cannot be dissociated from the institution in which the other who has been both lost and named reassures human beings of the certainty that what *is* will endure.

It is true that recognition of a primal relationship between the idea

of death and the idea of something that endures for ever serves only to familiarize us with the inconceivable, and that it leaves us powerless to deal with the specific question of immortality and of its eventual death or semi-death. The notion allows us to formulate, in a singular way, the experience of *that which lasts for ever*. In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt draws our attention to the distinction, or rather the opposition, between immortality and eternity. In her view, immortality is to be recognized when men cannot conceive of a world other than the world they inhabit ... a world which displays obvious signs of its permanence. Greek thought bears witness to this experience:

Immortality means endurance in time, deathless life on this earth and in this world as it was given, according to Greek understanding, to nature and the Olympian gods. Against this background of nature's ever-recurring life and the gods' deathless and ageless lives stood mortal men, the only mortals in an immortal but not eternal world, confronted with the immortal lives of their gods but not under the rule of an immortal God.²¹

Men alone are mortal because, unlike animals, they are not members of a species whose immortal life is guaranteed through procreation. It is therefore as individuals that they aspire to partake of the divine nature by producing works, deeds and words which will leave behind them an imperishable trace. The certainty that the world and the higher beings that populate it will endure for ever is, however, destroyed by the Christian religion and by the new notion of a transcendent God, of a place outside the world where man will find an eternal resting place, compared with which the time of earthly life will count as nothing. But, as Arendt also observes, its destruction is prefigured in Antiquity by the birth of philosophy, when the excellence of the contemplative life is proclaimed at the expense of the active life, the *vita activa*. This event appears to her to be decisive in that it reveals the link between the idea of immortality and political life, as well as that between immortality and life in the world. When man ceases to be defined by his participation in the City and by his relations with his equals – each appearing before all and producing a self-image to be shown to all – his hope of imprinting something of himself on the duration of time disappears. Immortality requires the institution of the deployment of the public space. But it should not be supposed that it is therefore a contingent manifestation which is dependent upon a certain form of society. Political life, in Arendt's sense of the term and in the sense in which it was recognized in the Greek City, is the highest form of the human condition. For her, the loss of a sense of immortality therefore coincides with the loss of a sense of the human condition.

Arendt returns to this theme and develops it further in a chapter in which she evokes the decline of modern humanity. That men have a

sensible experience of a common world, of a world which pre-exists and outlives every generation, is not, in her view, enough to ensure its consistency and its transcendence.

Such a common world can survive the coming and going of the generations only to the extent that it appears in public. It is the publicity of the public realm which can absorb and make shine through the centuries whatever men want to save from the natural ruin of time. Through many ages before us – but not any more – men entered the public realm because they wanted something of their own or something they had in common with others to be more permanent than their earthly lives. . . .

Arendt adds: 'There is perhaps no clearer testimony to the loss of the public realm in the modern age than the almost complete loss of authentic concern with immortality, a loss somewhat overshadowed by the simultaneous loss of the metaphysical concern with eternity.'²⁵ Hence the conclusion that: 'Under modern conditions, it is indeed so unlikely that anybody should [in our day] earnestly aspire to an earthly immortality that we probably are justified in thinking that it is nothing but vanity.'²⁶

Whence the withering away of the public realm in our age? In one sense, its decline appears to be an indirect result of Christianity's devaluing of the earthly world.

The Christian abstention from worldly things is by no means the only conclusion one can draw from the conviction that the human artifice, a product of mortal hands, is as mortal as its makers.

This, on the contrary, may also intensify the enjoyment and consumption of the things of the world, all manners of intercourse in which the world is not primarily understood to be the *kaïnon*, that which is common to all.²⁷

In another sense, the spectacle of modern society further elucidates the phenomenon: it is a mass society in which individuals find themselves trapped in the narrow circle of their private lives, and are at the same time swallowed up in and carried away by an undifferentiated collective vision of the real when they come together. We will not pursue this latter explanation. Let us, rather, retain the hypothesis that the notion of an indefinite time being allotted to men and their works is, for Arendt, intrinsically bound up with the emergence of a space which is, by right, open to all, which stands out against the background of the social, and which gives everyone a universal visibility. The division of time – a time for beings and mortal things, a time for beings and immortal things – coincides with the first division between the private realm and the public realm. This is also the division between a truly social life in which men are still stratified because of the

requirements of labour and the satisfaction of needs, and because of political life, which delivers them from their obscurity and inspires in them a passion for their image and for their mode of appearance, a passionate desire to be seen and recognized by their equals. If we follow Arendt, it is, then, futile to look for the basis of the belief in immortality in a religious or metaphysical quietism, or simply in the fear of death, and it is also futile to stress the distinction between personal survival and the survival of the institution. She suggests that, once he appears on the public stage, man comes to dwell in his own image, that he no longer belongs to himself as an individual, that he becomes immortal in his own lifetime, or even by challenging death, regardless of what his representation of his own destiny may be.

We will not, perhaps, understand Arendt's thought if we confine ourselves to a reading of *The Human Condition*, and if we restrict our discussion to the contrast between the ancient City and modern mass society. For her, the *polis* is merely a reference which is intended to shed light upon the political institution of the common world or upon the opposition between immortality and eternity. It is therefore self-evident that, when she speaks of the withering away of the public domain in our era, she is alluding to a recent past in which it was fully deployed. If we refer to her essay *On Revolution*, this becomes obvious: the world that we have lost is the world that was built, momentarily, by the French and American Revolutions. Men then had the strength to break with the Christian ethic – sometimes without realizing it; they were able to rehabilitate life on earth; they passionately set themselves the task of building an eternal city, and identified their own immortality with that of their political achievement:

Nothing perhaps indicates more clearly that the revolutions brought to light the new, secular and worldly yearnings of the modern age than this all-pervasive preoccupation with permanence, with a 'perpetual state' which, as the colonists never tired of repeating, should be secure for their posterity'. It would be quite erroneous to mistake these claims for the later bourgeois desire to provide for one's children and grandchildren. What lay behind them was the deeply felt desire for an Eternal City on earth, plus the conviction that 'a Commonwealth rightly ordered may, for any internal causes, be as immortal or as long-lived as the World.'²⁸

At the time of the two great revolutions, modern peoples turned, according to Arendt, 'once more to antiquity to find a precedent for [their] new preoccupation with the future of the man-made world on earth'. At the same time, the individual actor on the political stage was transfigured, and escaped his own mortal existence. Modern politics found its 'briefest and most grandiose expression' in Robespierre's phrase, 'Death is the beginning of immortality'.²⁹ This is something

that our contemporaries would now find inconceivable. If the prophecy is turned into a statement of fact, Arendt could easily, it would seem, endorse Michel's verdict: 'In times of weakness, it will no longer be possible to understand how, in the midst of these bloody revolutions, and with one foot in the grave, these extraordinary men could dream only of immortality'.³⁰

Whilst this interpretation is attractive, we have to go beyond its limitations, as the arguments it mobilizes make it difficult to interpret the representation of immortality which arose out of the Greek political universe. How can one reveal the link between the sense of immortality and the sense of posterity, which is so obvious in revolutionary language, without noting that it is new? How can one forget that, for the Greeks, there was no question of building 'an eternal city on earth', that their City was essentially divine, that immortal life surrounded them, that works and deeds performed in the present were but that their makers could not remove them from the cycle of history, and could not, so to speak, make them participate in the immortal work of creation? How, on the other hand, can a writer be so alert to the double division of space and time – the obscure space of the social, and the public, luminous space of the political; the time of transience and the time of immortality – without seeing that, in the modern world, it implies a tension of which the ancient world, or at least the epoch which Arendt evokes, knew nothing? A citizen of Athens may well have immortalized himself on the political stage but, insofar as he was a member of society, he owned a fragment of the divine land which gave him the right to be a citizen. Nothing in distant Antiquity suggests the idea that the City, humanity or history could be transcended within the world or within time. And is it not because religion makes it impossible that we find no sign of that idea? Suggestive though it may be, Arendt's formula '*Eternity versus Immortality*' is misleading if it leads us to ignore how the idea of immortality both persisted and was transformed as a result of the belief in *another world*. The only aspect of the Christian religion to which Arendt refers is its devaluing of earthly life; there is of course no lack of solid evidence to support her thesis and she could produce more than one argument in favour of it. But the work of Christianity has to be read in two ways: the notion of the fall of man, who expiates his original sin in his human condition, is combined with the notion of a human incarnation of the divine.

We see the first signs of 'modern' immortality in the body of Christ, a body which, in the Middle Ages, finds substitutes in the bodies of the Pope, the Emperor and the King, and which is actualized in the community, circumscribed as it is within its indestructible space; the Church, and then the kingdom and humanity itself. Dante is merely following an established tradition when he creates the figure of a universal monarchy and gives it the mission of revealing humanity unto

itself in all its unity – a unity which transcends the diversity of the 'nations' from the far north to the far south – and in its continuous duration – which transcends the never-ending sequence of the generations, each of which appears as a limb of a single body moving through space. But it is not enough to examine the ambiguity of these religious representations in terms of their explicit content. The remarkable thing about them is the way they become invested in political representations, in the laicized, secularized and worldly representations which crystallize at the end of the eighteenth century, even though they had begun to take shape earlier. The image of the immortal body of the kingdom is grafted on to that of the territorial state. The theme of defending the king allies itself with that of defending the fatherland, and thus ensures that the warrior who dies for its sake will enjoy immortality upon earth, just as the warrior who died in the defence of Jerusalem was certain to enter into Paradise at the time of the Crusades. A whole segment of the history of beliefs remains hidden from us if we ignore how transcendence was transferred into the frontiers of worldly space; and whilst its transference into that space was in part unconscious, it was also the result of deliberate efforts on the part of the politicians and jurists who were striving to elevate monarchical power above all *de facto* powers, to give it a different kind of life to that enjoyed by mortal institutions and mortal men, and to give the state something it lacked and which it had once possessed when it was rooted in a divine land: *perennité in time*. That their efforts were based upon an acquaintance with Roman law and with the philosophy of Aristotle, that they would have been inconceivable without the reactivation of the knowledge of the *universitas* of the *communitas* which establishes the status of *perpetuitas* as opposed to change – which establishes, that is, an immutable law thanks to Christianity, a new link was forged between the One who exists outside time and the individual or collective body, between a transcendental sovereignty and worldly life.³¹

For centuries, the king was the ultimate symbol of this being in the world, which is at once its own inferior and its own superior, which is at once mortal and immortal. But if we look even briefly at a free city at the moment when it is beginning to evolve towards the state form, at, for example, Florence in the latter part of the fourteenth century, we cannot fail to be struck by the fact that its efforts to constitute itself as a republic in order to leave no place for a tyrant are paralleled by a desire to seize the attributes of monarchy, to produce an image of a sovereignty which is distanced from all its members and which is immortal.

This is especially remarkable in that it is in Florence, in modern Europe, that an ethics of the *vita activa*, as opposed to the contemplative life, begins to be elaborated under the sign of a return to Antiquity, of the restoration of the power of man in the world, and of the renewal

of the civic spirit. We therefore cannot deny the originality of humanism by replacing it in the context of a Christian society. Many of the features Arendt regards as being characteristic of what might be called revolutionary humanism, which appeared in the eighteenth century, can already be seen in Florentine humanism, including the belief that works performed by the City contain a universal truth. Particular significance should be given to the double attempt to elevate to immortality both the Florentine fatherland and those citizens who contributed to its greatness – those who distinguished themselves in the conduct of public affairs or in war, or as writers, artists or merchants – an attempt which was at the time, we can legitimately assume, facilitated by the formation of a public space, of a public stage.

We will, however, perhaps be in a better position to grasp the modernity of the sense of immortality and all the features that differentiate it from the Greek conception of the world if we compare it with the former event.

It has rightly been noted that humanism in fact introduces a sense of history, a sense of a time-difference.⁷⁰ The ancient world was not discovered, as though it were something that had been lost and then found again. Traces of it survived throughout the Middle Ages, not only in the writings of the great authors – most of whom were of course the object of *studia humanitatis* – and in monuments, but above all in the use of the Latin language. Indeed, historians tell us that it was not perceived as a different world, despite the break between Christianity and paganism. That perception is characteristic of humanism. What we have termed a return to Antiquity therefore implies its institution, the institution of a past which is removed from the present. The experience of *temporal separation* is a precondition for communication, or in its extreme form, identification with the ancients; it is also the precondition for an opening on to the future, an opening created by deeds, knowledge, art and pedagogy, by a work of creation which is legitimized by the creation of the past. The humanists saw themselves as heirs but, at the same time, they acquired a posterity. The dignity of the *vita activa* is combined with the dignity of the life of the citizen, but, in more general terms, it is instituted by a new relationship with the work of art. Hannah Arendt appears to be curiously insensitive to this event. When she speaks of works of art in *The Human Condition*, she accords them a permanence which seems to have the properties of an essence. The world of art appears to her to be *par excellence* a 'non-mortal home for mortal beings'.⁷¹ It is, then, important to investigate both the birth of this feeling of permanence and the significance it acquires when it becomes conjoined with a representation of the work of art as having a singular identity, as being localized in space and time. The idea of permanence alone cannot account for another idea which seems to emerge together with humanism: the idea that works of art are contemporaneous *within* a time-difference; the idea of a conjunction between something that no

longer exists and something that does not yet exist. If, however, we concentrate exclusively on the revolution in the experience of time that is introduced by humanism, we will fail to see that it is shaped by a rejection of the 'dark ages', which, in the eyes of those who wanted to escape them, were not yet over. For the humanists, the awareness that Antiquity is a different world whose authenticity has to be restored implies a break with the language, the knowledge and the morals of a degraded humanity, a will to extract themselves from the darkness of a period in which custom replaces truth. The effects of this break are ambiguous in that, on the one hand, it implies emancipation from established authorities in every domain of life, a demand for creativity, and an apprehension of the present – and one of the most remarkable signs of this is the full recognition of the virtues of the vernacular – and in that, on the other hand, it leads to real life being confined within a circle of men of letters who understand the works of the ancients, who can read them and who can use language correctly – and so, paradoxically, Latin is restored to its purity as a canonical language. We might even venture to say that humanism thus paves the way for the emergence of two conceptions of immortality. To a large extent, it stakes its destiny on an attempt to master the experience of contemporaneity within a time-difference, to erect a theatre in which things that seem, in terms of the agreed signs, to deserve not to perish are authorized to appear, and to install the new in a future commensurate with the demands of the present by inviting posterity to participate in the great spectacle of culture. It is therefore not surprising that the project of humanism should have become imbricated with that of Christianity, or that they should have collaborated in 'manufacturing' a transcendence that could take place within the world. Ancient maxims extolling immortal entities such as Reason, Justice, Wisdom and Fatherland are combined with religious references in order to glorify and immortalize the monarchy. Greek and Roman mythology is mobilized through poetry, statuary and painting to represent the presence of the Prince as being beyond time. But this phenomenon also has much wider implications: the notion of the sovereignty of the author or of his work takes on a political and religious meaning, just as the notion of the sovereignty of the Prince or the nation finds support in a scholarly culture and in theology. And it is not illegitimate to ask whether the Revolution might not have put an end to this trade in immortality. Arendt refuses to see the Revolution as anything other than the moment of the foundation or refoundation of the political, of the deployment of a public space, and of the establishment of an *eternal city* built by men for men. It is astonishing that she should see the use of new artifices to resurrect Antiquity and to put it to new ends solely in this light, that she should express her delight with Robespierre's 'Death is the beginning of immortality' without concerning herself with his heroic posture, or with the way politics, culture and history are staged to dazzle the common people.

Edgar Quinet appears to me to display more perspicacity than Arendt or even Michelet when he observes that:

No tribune in the world ever spoke a less popular, more learned or more studied language than Robespierre and Saint-Just. Anyone who tried to speak the language of the people immediately and naturally seemed hateful to them. They always saw the Revolution in terms of the pomp of Cicero and the majesty of Tacitus.

In an evocation of one of the final episodes of the Terror, he adds: 'It was the classical, lettered revolution of the Jacobins which crushed the uneducated and plebeian revolution of the Cordeliers. Robespierre was acting out a classical tragedy. Anything that went beyond its orderly conventions – life, spontaneity, popular instinct – appeared to him to be a monstrosity. And he attacked it with sword and fire.'³⁴

And yet, we said, we can detect in humanism a different notion of immortality, which is not subordinate to a representation of sovereignty, and which can be placed under the sign of *conversation* or, to use a term which was dated even at the time and which is understood in a different sense by the moderns, *friendship*. When it is understood in this sense, there is no mastering of a time-difference, but merely the feeling that the invisible *other* is closer than the living, that his words can be heard despite his fate at the hands of time, or that words can be entrusted to him in some indefinite future. The dialogue with the dead had, of course, become a genre in itself, and it conferred a flattering nobility on its author. But, to evoke the Florence of the so-called Renaissance age once more, listen to the sobriety we find in, for example, Machiavelli's dialogues with the ancients. In a letter which was to become famous, he tells his friend Vettori how, when he had been banished from Florence, he spent his time in rural exile. Having described the morning he spent in the woods, he mentions stopping at the inn opposite his house. He plays backgammon, quarrels with the inn-keeper, the butcher, the miller and two workmen from a lime-kiln; their oaths can be heard in the next village. He confides that he has to venture into his 'flee-pit' to prevent his brain from stagnating completely. Then, as evening falls, it is time for work:

I returned to my lodgings. I went into my study, and at the door I took off my everyday clothes, which were covered in mud and dirt, and put on pontifical court dress. Now that I was fittingly dressed, I entered the court of the men of Antiquity. They greeted me honourably, and I dined on that food that is above all mine and which I was born to eat. I felt no embarrassment at talking to them or at asking them to explain their actions, and out of human kindness, they were good enough to answer my questions. And for four hours I felt no boredom; I forgot all my

troubles, and I even ceased to fear poverty. I was not even afraid of death. (emphasis added)³⁵

Finally, we are told that these conversations were not fruitless: a little book is coming into being: *De Principatibus* (later to be known as *The Prince*). By describing how he went from the tavern to his study and how he changed his clothes, Machiavelli makes it clear that he is stepping into a time that exists outside time. The change is further stressed by the quality of the clothes he put on. They are not simply any ceremonial garments, and they are not those he wore when he carried out his duties in Florence. He had use for pontifical or royal court dress only when he was sent abroad on mission, when he was dispatched by the Republic as its ambassador. But such dress is indispensable if he is to appear in the presence of Livy, Tacitus, Aristotle or Xenophon, and if he is to converse with them, if they are to recognize that he has been sent on a historical mission, that he is modern humanity's delegate to Antiquity. Without any reference being made to God or to the division between heaven and earth, we have here a representation of a division between the living and the next, between the trivial place we inhabit alongside the living and the place of immortality. Notice, however, that Machiavelli never pronounces the word 'immortality'. He is content to say: 'I was not even afraid of death'. Why is he so serene? Because, in order to speak to the dead, one must speak as though one were dead? No doubt. But it is primarily that he has the feeling of having another life, not in the vague sense that he will endure for ever, but in the very precise sense that he is undeniably present for others, for the world and for himself in a realm beyond time. The invisible interlocutors Machiavelli joins are as alive as his companions in the tavern: he himself is more alive than the backgammon player he dismisses at the door. The inextinguishable conversation becomes a source of constant mutual recognition, the source of his future work.

Machiavelli thus describes an experience which many other writers have described and which, although it finds its clearest expression in the Renaissance, is not confined to that period: the experience of a dialogue which breaks down the barriers of time and which, through the duality of question and answer, speaking and listening, institutes a singularity – the singularity of someone or something – that cannot be broken down into a 'once' and a 'now'. In such an experience, immortality does not look down from on high; it is, rather, a transition surface, the movement of time is reversible. The idea of that which does not die is indissociable from that of the sovereignty of the immortal being – an idea which was, we said, bound up with that of a superhuman power, with that of an invulnerable body which supplied everyone with an image of survival.

Perhaps, however, we can best grasp the sign of this sovereignty at

the moment when a glorious immortality meets with a radical challenge: when the proclamation of *perpetuitas* is countered with the proclamation of *vanitas*. The negation reveals the basis of the assertion by turning it inside out. Either *vanitas* becomes a sign that all power belongs to the Eternal, before whom all human creations are as nothing, or, and for our purposes this is more relevant, it promotes an emphatic election of death, and installs death in the place of sovereignty. No one has done more to unveil the complicity between the representation of immortality and death, or their relationship with sovereignty, than Shakespeare. When, having heard of Bolingbroke's rebellion and having proclaimed the invulnerability of his pompous body, Richard II suddenly glimpses the impossible – the fact that he will be purged from it – the image of death's elect replaces that of God's elect: the crown, which was an indestructible substance becomes 'the hollow crown wherein death keeps his court'. ('For with-in the hollow crown/That rounds the mortal temples of a king/Keeps death his court.') It should not be forgotten that Shakespeare puts these words into the mouth of a prince; there is no suggestion that he himself believes them. He has too fine a perception of the contradictory nature of the sovereign to want to take his place. He urges us, his readers, to accept the idea of a double time without succumbing to the illusion of a double body, and spurs us the alternative of having to give all to immortality or having to give all to death.

To return to our initial question. The thought of the men of the nineteenth century was still haunted by a sense of immortality. That sense of immortality seems to have disappeared or, paradoxically to have survived only by becoming compromised with a respect for the past, only by becoming bound up with a sense of posterity. These, it appears to me, are the most characteristic features of modern times. Perhaps matters become less certain than Adorno and Arendt suggest, if we agree to separate out the various representations implied by the current sense of the word – a task we have just outlined. Perhaps matters become even less certain if we pay attention to the alterations they underwent even in the nineteenth century, in a world which was turned upside down by what Tocqueville called the 'democratic revolution'. I say 'alterations' because in this respect there is no radical discontinuity between the Ancien Régime and post-revolutionary society. Numerous signs testify to the persistence of the theological-political vision of the immortal body. To extend the discussion beyond the frontiers of Catholicism, the Saint-Simoniens, to take only one example, espoused a belief in an organic society which was to be built on the ruins of the revolutionary ages, and which would be able to conceive of and celebrate its own immortality. The invention of the 'religion of humanity'; Enfantin's substitution of the indestructible body of society, or even that of humanity, for that of the king; the substitution of Science for the holy book; of Saint-Simon for the

Messiah – none of these events can conceal the heritage of the past, even though they relate to a completely new vision of industry and of organization, and, more generally, to an artificialist, constructivist philosophy of the social which breaks with Christian tradition. The humanist conception of a glorious immortality, on the other hand, begins to blossom with the rise of the bourgeoisie, and this is a phenomenon with much wider implications. The elaboration of a national history and of a history of humanity, and the legitimization of the individual, which existed only in outline in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, supply it with new resources. But we can still see traces of earlier attempts to imprint the nation, the institution and the individual on a monumental time, to sanctify Reason and Right – the Right whose 'immortal principles' were finally established in 1789 – to engrave imperishable names on the collective memory, and to hand on to future generations the torch borne by the living, as thinkers of the period were so fond of saying.

If, however, we compare 'religious insanity' with bourgeois humanism, we see that something new does appear: the function of discourse, which is constantly pressed into service to produce immortality. Not that immortality ever lacked a symbolic, or even propaganda, when it served the monarchy and the republic. But there is no comparison between that and the rhetorical and pedagogical means that are employed to make belief in immortality a guarantee of the durability, not only of a specific regime, constitution or institution – beginning with the institution of the family – but of *civilization itself*. The explanation for this urgent need to express belief in immortality in formulae and eloquent images is that men are haunted by the idea of the break-up of the social, and that democracy threatens, sometimes implicitly and often explicitly, to bring that about. Civic humanism took shape in the fifteenth century, we noted, as a result of a desire to emerge from an age of darkness into the light that the Ancients had known; it flourished in a climate of confidence in a new foundation. The bourgeois humanism of the nineteenth century experiences an ambiguity which undermines its certainties. It does not see barbarism simply as a thing of the past – not to mention the fact that it usually regards barbarism as having two aspects: that of feudal times and that of the Terror, which means that even the light of 1789 cannot make it forget the darkness that surrounds it. Ranged in front of it, it sees the barbarian masses, the 'little people' who have no property and no culture, who are ready to rise, and whose intrusion on to the public stage would destroy the eternal foundations of the social order. At the same time, no one can sound the depths of this fear or plumb the void that lies within the proud construction, at the heart of the supposedly imperishable edifice of bourgeois civilization without seeing that it also produces a new feeling that both the principle and the heart of civilization are contingent. The great task, which is best expressed by Guizot, is to make it clear that *the Revolution is over*. But what no

one seems able to eradicate is the idea of the *event*, not merely of that specific event, but of the event as such, which no longer exists with time, but which can fracture and undo time, which can give birth to the unknown: it has all the might of disorder, and no established order can be guaranteed to prevent it from being unleashed.

If we accept that the notion of sovereign immortality was bound up with the ultimate legitimacy of the body politic and that it was for centuries bound up with the legitimacy of the monarchy, how could it fail to become fragile after the collapse of the monarchy, and particularly after the tragic failure of a terrorist power which claimed to be the incarnation of Eternal Reason and Justice? The bourgeoisie, of course, tries feverishly to acquire new emblems entitling it to legitimacy and to promote a recognition of its vocation for immortality, but it cannot raise itself up without sensing the void beneath its feet. The power to which it gives its allegiance – representative power – is no longer organically linked to society, and the age on which it wants to inscribe the symbols of its durability is no longer organically linked to earlier ages. In the aftermath of 1830, Chateaubriand finds the words to jeer at the bourgeoisie: 'The only thing that we now lack is the present within the past. That is no great loss! As though the ages did not provide a foundation for one another, and as though the latest age could stand on thin air!'³⁶ Or again, 'The dynasty of Saint Louis was so powerful thanks to its extensive past that when it fell, it tore away part of society's foundations' – and it is not that he has any desire to see its restoration.³⁷ And if we also agree that attachment to imperishable things and beings is based upon the experience of a continuity between generations, customs and traditions, how can we fail to be struck by the contrast between the memory of that permanence, and the attempt to establish its signs, and the new vision of change, the acceleration of production, of the circulation of commodities, of the break-up of inherited property, and of mobility of condition, of the whirlwind that sweeps away established positions, morals and ideas? One usually thinks of Marx in connection with this whirlwind. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned ...³⁸ If we simply retain this passage from the *Manifesto* without mentioning its author's conclusions, we find that it is an expression of of a widespread view. Balzac – a privileged reference for Marx – exhibits a similar awareness of the whirlwind, especially in the astonishing picture of Paris that opens *La Fille aux yeux d'or*, but so too do Tocqueville, Chateaubriand, Michelet and Quinet. When one reads them, and when one reads Chateaubriand in particular, one hesitates to say that the advent of a mass society, the loss of a sense of duration and the ruin of the works or ideas on which it could once imprint itself are recent phenomena. Does the

conclusion of the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* refer to the last century, or to the end of our own century?

The old European order is expiring. In the eyes of posterity, our current debates will look like puerile struggles. Nothing exists: the authority of experience and age, birth or genius, talent or virtue are all denied; a few individuals climb to the summit of the ruins, proclaim themselves giants, and then fall to the bottom like pygmies.

He goes on:

In the life of the City, everything is transient; religion and morality are no longer accepted, or else everyone interprets them in their own fashion. In things of a lower nature, we find the same inability to convince, or even to exist; a reputation lasts for barely an hour, a book grows old in a day; writers kill themselves to attract attention; that too is vanity; no one even hears their last sighs.

Let us also look at one last passage, which is not simply a rhetorical flourish. On more than one occasion, Chateaubriand suggests that an era which brings people face to face with the banality of life also brings them face to face with the banality of death. Historians who claim that the death of Death occurred only a few decades ago would be astonished by the picture of cholera which the writer both dreams and describes. First, he dreams it: 'Imagine a shroud floating like a banner from the towers of Notre-Dame, and the canon firing single shots to warn the imprudent traveller. ... He dreams of it reducing a prostrate people to terror and silence as they tremble at their prayers. And then he describes cholera in Paris in 1817: 'A scourge with no imagination ... walking abroad with a mocking smile in the bright light of day in a completely new world, and carrying a bulletin. ... Cholera is certainly an agent of terror, but it is an agent of an unknown terror. Brilliant sunshine, an indifferent crowd, the ordinary round of life. ...'

The image of a glorious immortality does undergo a renaissance in the nineteenth century, but it conceals a wound to which the turgidity of bourgeois discourse bears witness, and a small number of witnesses know just how deep that wound is. The witnesses themselves have not, however, lost their sense of immortality. And that concerns us closely.

Could it be that they are still heirs to the discreet humanism we described earlier, to a humanism which does not give way to rapture, and which, through the experience of conversation, leads, despite time, to a recognition of men and their works? To a certain extent this is no doubt true. But the notion of time-difference is not the same, once the notion of time itself has changed, once the fracture between *before*

and *after* has become immediately tangible, once, as a result of that fracture, humanity's whole past – the Orient as well as Greece, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance – emerges, is summoned into the present, and simultaneously becomes a sign of a world that is vanishing. The past re-emerges, charged with meaning, but also marked with the sign of loss. And nor does the notion that man has two lives – a trivial, prosaic life spent in day-to-day dealings with others, and a poetic life in which he participates in the universe of culture and politics – remain unchanged, once political life and literary production are no longer confined to minority groups, once they permeate the entire space of society, once, to put it another way, the representation of the audience which nourishes the work becomes combined – I will not say confused – with that of opinion.

We would try in vain to dissociate the idea of immortality which haunts the writer and his awareness of posterity from his new experience of temporality and his new relationship with the public. Chateaubriand, whom we evoked earlier, is worthy of mention because, all too often, it is said that he displays an immoderate desire to immortalize himself and to provide a spectacle for posterity – and he does at times display unmistakable signs of that desire. Yet few writers shared his awareness of the void that was opened up by the fall of the monarchy, and of the impossible coincidence between what once was – and it seems to him that it has gone for ever – and what is yet to be – a future which he sometimes imagines to be a constant process of decadence, and which he sometimes recognizes as the era of another society which men are not yet mature enough to accept. The monarchy had legitimacy and immortality on its side, and he says so, but he knows that it is dead. And, however much he may regret the fact that its life-span was cut short by its adversaries, it is impossible to believe that he sees it as being the victim of an accident. His picture of the Legitimist world leaves us in no doubt as to that: 'He enjoys the decrepitude that comes with time; he is blind and deaf; he is frail, ugly and surly; but he looks quite natural, and crutches suit him at his age.' The concession to the *natural* is made only in order to bring out just how ridiculous the survivors of the Empire are. They are not antiques like the Legitimists, and they have not grown old as a dated fashion grows old; they are like the deities that descend from their chariots of gold carboard on the stage of the opera. The image of the opera itself helps him to reveal the monarchical masquerade. As he describes the theatre in which the Duc de Berry was assassinated, he evokes 'the empty auditorium after the end of a tragedy' and concludes: 'The monarchy of Saint Louis lay dying behind a mask amongst the debauchery of a carnival, in a place which the Church had pronounced anabema.' This respect for Charles X after his abdication go hand in hand with the public statement that he never believed in the divine right of kings. He sees legitimacy and the old immortality as no more than simulacra

which were useful to the social order. As for his own sense of immortality, not only does he fail to invest it in a sovereignty which could have guaranteed the immortality of his work; it finds expression in his very ability to say both that it has gone and that it was never anything more than a mask. More generally, it finds expression in his ability to occupy a position that cannot be localized in time and space because it is not the position in which he distinguished himself in public life or in literature. It is a position which revealed how far he was from having his roots in reality, because it did not inscribe him in the glorious course of History; but it did open his eyes to what was appearing and what was disappearing in time – or, to be more accurate, for it is not simply a matter of seeing what was falling into the past, and what was in gestation, it did give him *time regained in time lost*.

The choice of words is no accident, for no work does more to anticipate Proust than the *Mémoires*. No other work blurs in this way the conventional boundaries between subjective and objective, between the individual and the social, between personal and historical temporality, between being and appearance; no other work tries in this way, as Chateaubriand puts it, to make 'both ends of life meet by undoing the representation of beginning, middle and end, and that of an outline which allows an imaginary world to be kept at a distance from a real world.'

The sense of immortality proves to be bound up with the conquest of a place *which cannot be taken*, which is invulnerable, because it is the place of someone – who is neither an individual in the contemporary sense of the word nor a subject in the philosophical sense of the word – who, by accepting all that is most singular in his life, refuses to submit to the coordinates of space and time and who is so disproportionate that he sets free breaks and relations which no one before him has experienced and which we now experience through him.

We would attempt in vain to reduce this frame of mind to the status of a psychological or psychosociological trait. We are not dealing with a desire for glory that has been reshaped by the new cult of originality. If we believe that, we forget one thing: for us, Chateaubriand is not dead. And why does he live on, unless it is because his thought and his language make him peerless and because (and this amounts to the same thing) they cause to emerge from within thought and language themselves something which is unprecedented but still specific, something which partakes of their essence, something singular which, once it has come into being, bears the strange hallmark of being something that must be.

Can we say that this *place that cannot be taken* has always been the place of the writer, no matter how far back in history we go? Even if that were true, we would have to admit that the writer never knew it. The certainty of being must vanish into the experience of nature, society, time, and language if writing is to become the theatre in which there comes into play the dizzying freedom to create something unique

without the guarantee of a model. It must vanish if someone is to assume the *right* to speak without the protection of the law which supposedly founds the organization of speech, or to cease to divorce discovery from the invention of what has to be said. The dissolution of the markers of certainty coincides with the rise of democracy as a result of the collapse of the ultimate sovereignty or legitimacy which the Monarchy had for centuries claimed to embody. But, as we have already suggested, there is another aspect to that event: everything that once bore a meaning that was in search of eternity is now diffused amongst an ever-expanding audience and its fate now depends upon the public reception it is given: the obverse of that event is the expansion of a language which, because it breaks with popular speech or with what Stendhal calls the *natural*, proves to have the quality of a scholarly language, to be organized in accordance with norms, and to have, ultimately, the function of ensuring that the search for eternity is identified with it because they both mean breaking with the masses. And so the writer can only reach the impregnable place he seeks by making a constant effort to escape the apparently volatile but profoundly petrified language of Opinion. He does not simply assume the right to speak without the protection of the law that founds language: he defends himself against the *tyrant* described by Tocqueville: the anonymous power of Opinion, which absorbs all that is thought or spoken – the singular as such – and converts it into a *commonplace*. We took Chateaubriand as an example, but he is presumably not the only true writer of the nineteenth century to have been haunted by the twin images of a stereotyped, standardized language which enslaves all speech, and from which speech must be reclaimed; and a language-abyss into which speech may fall, no matter how novel, nimble or intimate it may be.

But what is this *common place* where the imperishable motto cited in Latin becomes a platitude, where the latest fashionable turn of phrase and concepts that were invented yesterday triumph? Has it nothing to do with the *common world* which Arendt describes as being the basis for any thought of eternity? How can we give immortality a name, when the very word that names it is caught up in the contagion of stupidity? At the end of his *Revolution*, Quinet writes: 'Do you think that, now that it has been relentlessly exploited for four thousand years, stupidity or, to give it its historic name, foolishness, is still a virgin mine? No one who puts his hand into it is likely to exhaust it. He goes on!'

We become annoyed when we see foolishness: it is infatuated, self-assured, imperturbable and always new. We would be so much more equitable if we knew how sincere and how old this foolishness is, if we knew its noble lineage; if we knew how many stultified generations it has taken to bring it to this perfection of form and content; if we knew how long nature had to work to

spread it around, to choose it rather than any other element, to corroborate its descent from father to son, drawing it from every possible source, causing it to increase, and embellishing and decorating it down the ages; if we knew how nature has passed it down from set to bourgeois, from robe to sword, from cleric to seigneur in order to produce this prodigy of stultification which confounds us, outrages us and saddens us, and which we should, on the contrary, admire, were it not that we ourselves are part of it.

It is no doubt true that, like many men of his generation, Quinet still has a sense of immortality. But, ultimately, few men display their beliefs outside the framework of the dominant ideology. Hugo and Leroux were two such men, but they rebelled against what Quinet calls 'foolishness... infatuated, self-assured, imperturbable and always new and, as it happens, the foolishness against which they rebelled is the assertion that *immortality does not exist*. Their arguments are extravagant, not in the sense that they are not serious, but in the sense that they leave the beaten track, take their adversaries by surprise, use the whirlwind of writing to rescue their readers from the whirlwind of Opinion and, by mingling history, religion, science, politics and writing, make them lose all sense of time and place.

Canetti writes of Stendhal that: 'This rare and free man had, none the less, one article of faith, which he spoke of as simply and as naturally as of a mistress. Without prying himself, he was content to write for a few, but he was certain that in a hundred years he would be read by many.'³⁹ The image of a mistress is well chosen in that it captures the idea that immortality is no longer a question for the law, that it has become the most private aspect of human life, and that it has nothing to do with making a glorious appearance in the public space.

Dare we venture to say that the new attitude towards immortality that we find in a small number of nineteenth-century writers helps us to understand the oblivion into which it has fallen in our century? Something that could once be said, provided that it was said unambiguously, can no longer be normally said. But what cannot be said is not necessarily dead, and it is not necessarily a sign of degradation. Arendt is certainly right to denounce the tragedy of mass society, and Adorno is certainly right to denounce one of its effects: the culture industry. But they are only half right. They fail to see that, although it has forgotten immortality, modernity has defied certain tyrants, and has even embalmed the bodies of some of them after their deaths. They also fail to see that, ultimately, there is an element of prudence and virtue in rejecting the representation of an indestructible body. Significantly, Canetti places his eulogy of Stendhal at the end of a chapter entitled 'The survivor'. The lowest form of the passion for survival is, he believes, to be found in the tyrant – the lowest and,

I would add, the most obscene, because he does not simply kill in order to survive; he forces everyone to fix his gaze on him, and violates everyone's consciousness. That in itself should inspire our era to take a more sober view of the idea of immortality and to reject every sign of ostentation. 'Whoever opens Stendhal,' Canetti goes on, 'will find him and also everything which surrounded him; and he finds it *here*, in this life.'⁴⁰ We find the same contrast, in even more curious form, between the image of a tyrant who swallows up the living, and the image of a link between human beings that can survive time in a short story by Nabokov. *Tyrants Destroyed* is the story of a man who is literally possessed by the image of the body of a tyrant. He never leaves his double, and once even approaches him. Now, he is familiar with every detail of his life. They rise at the same time, eat the same frugal breakfast, and read through the same newspapers. From morning to night, he imitates the tyrant's every gesture, his every thought. But he thinks constantly of killing him. On the tyrant's birthday, he is carried away by a poem written in his honour. His hatred vanishes; he even wants to die, to be punished. And suddenly, laughter saves him. His laughter reveals that even his own story is ridiculous. But it transforms his desire for death into a desire for immortality. And so he dedicates his story to posterity:

This is an incantation, an exorcism, so that henceforth any man can exorcise bondage. I believe in miracles. I believe that in some way, unknown to me, this chronicle will reach other men ... And, who knows, ... I may be right not to rule out the thought that my chance labour may prove immortal, and may accompany the ages, now persecuted, now exalted, often dangerous and always useful.⁴¹

Here, the desire for immortality treads a very narrow path. A slender desire, borne along by a puff of laughter. But it is possible that Nabokov has captured an element in the spirit of our time that could not be revealed by the theorist of the *death of immortality*.

Notes

1 THE QUESTION OF DEMOCRACY

1. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1953).
2. See ch. 10.

2 HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE WELFARE STATE

1. This article provided the basis for a paper read to the Law Faculty of the Facultés Saint-Louis in Brussels on the occasion of a day conference organised by the Dean, François Ost, on '*Actualité des droits de l'homme dans l'Etat-providence*'. In it, I refer to a document drawn up by François Ost and his associates. The reader will forgive me if I occasionally use formulations from an earlier paper entitled '*Droits de l'homme et politique*', which was first published in 1980 (*Libre* 7 (1980), reprinted in *L'Invention démocratique* (Paris: Fayard, 1981). Translated as 'Politics and Human Rights', in: Alan Sheridan, in Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society*, ed. John B. Thompson (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1986). I have found it impossible to eliminate these minor repetitions without destroying the coherence of an argument which was elaborated with different purposes in mind.
2. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, the Henry Reeve translation as revised by Francis Bowen (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1945), vol. II, p. 318.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, p. 319.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 321.
7. Lefort, 'Politics and Human Rights'.
8. Pierre Mannoni, 'Démocratie et totalitarisme', *Commentaire*, IV, 16 (1981 2),
9. Pierre Pachet, 'La Justice et le conflit des opinions', *Passe-Présent*, 2 (1983).

- (Petite Bibliothèque socialiste, Paris) can still be read with profit.
 4. As we noted earlier, Charles Andler in exemplary detail explores Marx's debt to his predecessors.

9 REVERSIBILITY

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution Française* (AR), vol. I, p. 193. References are to A.P. Mayer's edition of the *Oeuvres Complètes*.
2. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (DA). References are to the revised Reeve translation.
3. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Recollections*, tr. George Lawrence (Doubleday, Garden City, New York, 1971), p. 170.
4. Benjamin Constant, *De la liberté des modernes*, ed. Marcel Gauchet (Le Livre de poche, Paris 1980). Page references are given in parentheses in the body of the text.

10 FROM EQUALITY TO FREEDOM

1. The page references given in parentheses are to the revised Reeve translation.
2. François Furter brings out the ambiguities of Tocqueville's thought in his essay 'De Tocqueville and the Problem of the French Revolution', in Furter, *Interpreting the French Revolution*.
3. Despite its interest, the remainder of Book II will not be examined here. Tocqueville's views on the development of industry, on the condition of the proletariat, and as to whether or not the industrial class forms an aristocracy in the United States do relate to the problematic of equality and freedom, but their analysis would require a separate study.

11 THE PERMANENCE OF THE THEOLOGICO-POLITICAL?

1. G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, tr. William Wallace (The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1894), pp. 156-7.
2. Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1957).
3. Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch: Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France*, tr. J.E. Anderson (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1973).
4. Joseph Strayer, *Medieval Statecraft and the Perspectives of History* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1971).

12 THE DEATH OF IMMORTALITY?

1. Victor Hugo, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Club français du livre, Paris) vol. XII, p. 49.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

4. Pierre Leroux, *La Grèce de Solon* (Kailnicksick, Paris, 1979).
5. Cited in Pierre Albouy, *Mythographies* (Goré, Paris, 1976). Albouy gives an accurate account of the conflict between Hugo and Leroux and, more generally, of the intellectual climate on Jersey and Guernsey at this time.
6. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. II, p. 99.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 328.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 143-4.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
20. *Ibid.* For an analysis of Tocqueville's philosophy and of the basis of his interpretation of democracy, see Pierre Manent, *Tocqueville et la nature de la démocratie* (Julliard, Paris, 1982).
21. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, tr. E.F.N. Jephcott (Verso, London, 1978), pp. 100-1.
22. Philippe Ariès, *Essais sur l'histoire de la mort en Occident, du Moyen Âge à nos jours* (Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1975).
23. *Ibid.*
24. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 18.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 54-5.
28. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (Faber and Faber, London, 1963), p. 232. (The quotation is from Harrington.)
29. *Ibid.*, p. 235.
30. Michellet, 1868 preface to *La Révolution Française*.
31. On the advent of the modern state and on its theologico-political foundations, see Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, and Strayer, *Medieval Statecraft*.
32. E. Gann, *L'Éducation de l'homme moderne* (Fayard, Paris, 1962).
33. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 168.
34. Edgar Quinet, *La Révolution*, vol. II, p. 263.
35. Niccolò Machiavelli, letter to Francesco Vettori, in Machiavelli, *Il Principe, e Pagine dei Discorsi e delle Istorie*, ed. Luigi Russo (Sansoni, Florence, 1967), pp. 29-30.
36. Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* (Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1950), p. 492.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
38. Marx, 'Manifesto', p. 70.

39. Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, tr. Carol Stewart (Victor Gollancz, London, 1963), p. 277.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 278.
41. Vladimir Nabokov, *Tyrants Destroyed* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1975), pp. 36–7.

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